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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS
OFFICIAL REPORT

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The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

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 4 March 2021

The House met in a hybrid proceeding.

Noon

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Leeds.

Arrangement of Business Announcement

12.07 pm

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, the Hybrid Sitting of the House will now begin. Some Members are here in the Chamber, others are participating remotely, but all Members will be treated equally. Oral Questions will now commence. Please can those asking supplementary questions keep them brief and confined to two points? I ask that Ministers' answers are also brief.

Video-sharing Platforms: BBFC Ratings Question

12.07 pm

Asked by Lord Grade of Yarmouth

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to mandate the use of British Board of Film Classifications ratings for user-generated content on video sharing platforms.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Barran) (Con): My Lords, the British Board of Film Classification's age ratings are currently used by a number of video-on-demand providers. Although adoption is voluntary, we welcome their use. The video-sharing platform regime, for which Ofcom is the regulator, came into force on 1 November 2020. UK-established video-sharing platforms must now take appropriate measures to protect the public, including minors, from illegal and harmful material. Video-sharing platforms may adopt age ratings as an appropriate measure; however, they are not obliged to do so.

Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Con) [V]: I thank my noble friend the Minister for that reply, but there is a wider issue with BBFC certification. The recently launched Disney streaming service ran a documentary originally certificated by the BBFC as suitable for those aged 18 and over. Disney chose to self-certificate it as suitable for 12 and over. Believe me, some scenes in that documentary were truly horrific. To protect children, will the Government, as a matter of urgency, bang heads together and get every streaming service to sign up to the BBFC system, which is tried and trusted?

Baroness Barran (Con): I agree with my noble friend's last remark about this system being trusted. The Government have great trust in the BBFC's best-practice age ratings. On his suggestion that we bang heads

together, we aim to approach things more gently, but we are actively engaging with the industry to encourage other platforms to adopt the BBFC's ratings across all their content, and will keep the evidence for legislation in this area under review.

Baroness Rawlings (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare a past interest as a member of the first British video classification council, chaired by Lord Harewood. It was difficult then, so I ask the Minister how parents can be expected to manage their children's screen time today, when there is such a lack of regulation and a slow government response.

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend makes a valid point, and I know that parents have had extraordinary challenges in this area, particularly over the last year. She is aware that we are developing a media literacy strategy and that, last year, we published guidance on online safety for children. We should also remember that our broadcasters have educated, entertained and informed our children in the last year.

Viscount Colville of Culross (CB): The Government's response to the online harms White Paper says that:

"The regulator will be required to have regard to the fact that children have different needs at different ages when preparing codes of practice relevant to the protection of children."

What powers will Ofcom have to provide sufficient oversight and ensure enforcement of these additional protections? Will they be set out in the online safety Bill?

Baroness Barran (Con): I assure the noble Viscount that they will be set out in the legislation. Ofcom will have wide-ranging powers to tackle both illegal and harmful content. I am happy to write to him with more detail.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab) [V]: In December, the Minister spoke of the voluntary nature of the BBFC scheme, which she reminded us of earlier for video-on-demand services. One of the strengths of the BBFC's ratings is that they are well understood by parents and children alike. The same cannot be said for the inconsistent approaches adopted by platforms offering user-generated content. How do the Government plan to balance the undeniable need for change, to which noble Lords have referred, with their wish to minimise regulation, which is clearly not working at the moment?

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Lord will be aware that the adoption of BBFC ratings, particularly by Netflix, is a relatively recent development, so we have not yet made an assessment of its impact on both accessibility of content and other streaming services. As I said to my noble friend Lord Grade, we are keeping this under review.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD) [V]: My Lords, YouGov research confirms that 82% of parents and 73% of children want BBFC age ratings displayed on user-generated content on these video-sharing platforms. Given new duties under the revised audio-visual media

[LORD CLEMENT-JONES]

services directive to protect children, and with the promised duty of care, is not actual regulation from the Government needed to make sure that these platforms work with the trusted ratings from the BBFC to better protect children? Are not the Government running against the tide?

Baroness Barran (Con): We do not believe that we are running against the tide. The online harms legislation, which we have discussed extensively in this House and which I know we will debate in great detail in future, will make us a world leader in this regard.

Lord Farmer (Con): My Lords, sensibly regulating the wild west of user-generated content on the internet is essential, but potentially a whack-a-mole exercise, given the risk that it simply displaces activity elsewhere. How will the DCMS work with Ofcom to ensure that its implementation of the video-sharing platform regime develops understanding of how to regulate online services, in advance of the online safety Bill coming into force?

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend makes an important point. By the implementation of the video-sharing platform regime, as he suggests, Ofcom will build its experience in regulating harmful content while balancing freedom of expression. I understand that Ofcom is already preparing for its new responsibilities in relation to online harms by bringing in new technology and people with the right skills.

Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest in that for 10 years I was a vice-president of the BBFC. While the adoption of the BBFC's age ratings is currently voluntary, does the Minister welcome the fact that Netflix announced on 1 December last year that it had become the first platform to achieve complete coverage of its content under the BBFC's ratings, and that a number of other video-on-demand platforms use BBFC ratings for some of their content, including Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, Curzon Home Cinema and BFI Player? Will she continue to engage with the industry to encourage other platforms to adopt the BBFC's ratings across all their content?

Baroness Barran (Con): Absolutely. The Government welcome Netflix's decision and, as I mentioned earlier, we continue to work with a number of the providers in this area.

Baroness Kidron (CB) [V]: I refer the House to my interests on the register. Age rating is just one of the many tools needed to build the digital world that children deserve, but it is hugely important to children and families that are looking to curate an age-appropriate experience. Is the Minister aware that Apple and Google app stores routinely advertise apps and games as suitable for four-plus and nine-plus for services whose own terms and conditions state that they are only for 16-plus or adult use? This means that a child or parent will download an app on the false understanding that it is age appropriate. Does she agree that there is little point age-rating individual pieces of content if the largest companies in the world continue to mislabel products and services on an industrial scale?

Baroness Barran (Con): I would be happy to discuss the matter that the noble Baroness raises with the relevant platforms and the Video Standards Council. We encourage online store fronts to follow the BBFC best practice for labelling online apps, which includes signing up to the international age rating coalition system.

Lord Moynihan (Con): My Lords, I declare my interest as vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Esports. Does the Minister agree that in protecting children's rights, the views of gamers, children and teachers should be taken into account when considering a combination of age labelling, filters and parental controls, and that tools such as URI which provide age ratings for UGC available via online video-sharing platform services are exceptionally helpful in this context?

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend is right that the views of children, gamers and teachers are important. Under the video-sharing platform regime, UK-established platforms will be required to take appropriate measures to protect all their users from illegal content and minors from harmful content. Those measures could include a combination of age labelling, filters, parental controls and technical tools.

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. We now come to the second Oral Question.

Data Protection Act 2018: Children *Question*

12.18 pm

Asked by Baroness Kidron

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to their call for views and evidence for the Review of Representative Action Provisions, Section 189 Data Protection Act 2018, published on 27 August 2020, what plans they have to reflect the views of the children consulted as part of the Review in changes to the Data Protection Act 2018.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Barran): My Lords, DCMS officials consulted children directly as part of the call for views. Children who responded pointed to a lack of awareness about how to complain to the ICO or take action against a data controller when things go wrong. That is why we have committed to work with the ICO and other interested parties to raise awareness about the redress mechanisms available to all data subjects, including children. Our focus is on improving the operation of current law, rather than making legislative changes.

Baroness Kidron (CB) [V]: I thank the noble Baroness for her response. However, the other thing that children said in the Government's own review was that 96% of them thought that charities should be able to represent them—and that they had a “lack of support” and “had not heard of the ICO.”

As the noble Baroness said, they also lacked awareness of how companies such as advertisers might use their personal data—so they may not even know that they have a problem. As such, I challenge the noble Baroness to say that only a handful of people can successfully understand and challenge data protection law.

The other thing is that the Government's reasoning was that children now benefit from the protections of the age-appropriate design code, so I ask the noble Baroness, as Minister for Youth Policy and DCMS: how do the Government reconcile wilfully ignoring the views of children—in favour of the business interests of the tech sector—with their duties under Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is that views must be heard in “matters affecting the child”? Are we to understand from this that—

The Earl of Courtown (Con): My Lords, could the noble Baroness curtail her question? It is time for the Minister to reply.

Baroness Kidron (CB) [V]: I beg your pardon. Is it the Government's position to adopt protections for children and then block meaningful routes of redress?

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): It is very important that those people asking supplementary questions keep them to a sensible time—otherwise, it simply knocks out other speakers lower down the list.

Baroness Barran (Con): I reject the noble Baroness's suggestion that the Government are blocking off meaningful means of redress. Our current data protection laws already offer strong protections to people, including children and other vulnerable groups, and we will continue to assist them in exercising their rights. Through the review, we sought, and have listened to, the views of children and their parents, and we are working with the Information Commissioner's Office to raise awareness of the redress mechanisms available to them. Finally, civil society groups can still make complaints on behalf of children, as the noble Baroness suggests.

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab) [V]: My Lords, it is very hard to square the two strands that the Minister is dwelling on: that children were in favour of more legislation to help them challenge the issues concerned with their data, but also that there was not a strong enough case for introducing legislation. Given that the consequence of that decision, as has been said, is more children suffering from identity theft, online grooming, data profiling and microtargeting, can the Minister help us by explaining what would have been a strong enough case?

Baroness Barran (Con): As the noble Lord is aware, we considered the views of children and business, but the real issue here is less what would be a strong enough case and more whether the existing law is adequate—which we believe it is—and whether it needs to be implemented in a way that allows all data subjects to seek redress more easily, which it does; that is what we are working on.

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend the Minister agree that there is a pressing need for much greater levels of awareness and understanding? Furthermore, does she agree that it is crucial that we enable our young people, and indeed all people, to be financially, digitally and—crucially—data literate and aware?

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend is absolutely right, and that is why we focused, and will publish later this year, our media literacy strategy. This was absolutely underlined by the responses from parents.

Lord Lucas (Con) [V]: My Lords, is my noble friend aware of just how time-consuming it is for a young person to go through a complaint under the ICO rules, which is something I personally have done and have helped children with? Does she not consider it worth making it very clear to children that the civil society organisations representing them can do the bulk of the work, without constantly having to refer back to the child?

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend makes a fair point about the complexity in this area, but the ICO has been very clear that it will investigate companies that do not comply with the GDPR concerns reported to it—and that it will accept referrals and complaints from civil society organisations, which can play an important role.

Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB): My Lords, as a family judge, I regularly talked to children, some of them very young, about what they wanted to happen to them at the end of the proceedings. May I urge the Minister really and seriously to listen to children—because they very often have something extremely valuable to say?

Baroness Barran (Con): I entirely concur with the noble and learned Baroness.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, when I read the government response to the call for evidence, it struck me that it is as important, if not more so, to take account of and reflect on adequate protections and to ensure that they are in place for young people, who evidently have a distinct lack of knowledge and awareness about, for example, how an advertiser might use their personal data. If the noble Baroness agrees with me on that point, what thought have she and her department given to delivering that extra protection by non-legislative means? If she has any examples to share, I am sure the House would welcome them.

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Lord makes an important point, particularly in relation to adtech. As he will be aware, the ICO has recently reopened its investigation into it, which it had to pause last year because of Covid-19 constraints. If it is to be effective, our media literacy strategy needs to cover all these points, including giving children and their parents an understanding of how their data is used.

Baroness Uddin (Non-Aff): My Lords, among millions of disadvantaged parents and children, awareness of data protection and online harms in general is very

[BARONESS UDDIN]

fragmented. Could the Minister assure the House that the children consulted came from all sorts of backgrounds to give a broader picture? Does she agree that we cannot leave it to parents and teachers to manage the complexity of data protection—particularly in the context of online harms and safeguarding children from grooming and sexual exploitation—without government leadership with structural safety legislation?

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Baroness is right that it is important that we always talk to a wide range of children, which we always seek to do. She is also right that the responsibility to sort this out should not fall to the child or parents; really, we need this to be addressed much earlier on, which is one of the reasons that, in addition to the age-appropriate design code, the Government are developing a one-stop shop to give companies practical guidance about keeping children safer online.

Baroness Gardner of Parkes (Con) [V]: My Lords, can the Minister comment on what steps the Government will take to stop organisations’ growing use of “legitimate interest” to get around cookie refusals? What will HMG now do to help improve knowledge of data protection rights and the Information Commissioner’s Office among young people? It is clear from this review that they are, in the main, not aware of what is done with their personal data or that they can complain to the ICO.

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend is right; as other noble Lords have noted, this is a challenging area for young people in relation to making complaints. She asked specifically about “legitimate interest”, and I will write to her on that.

Baroness Massey of Darwen (Lab) [V]: [*Inaudible*]—2021, seek children’s views. They were rejected because they were asking whether children’s voluntary sector organisations should represent them in presenting those views. I understand that this was rejected because there was a lack of evidence; could the Minister explain this?

Baroness Barran (Con): I apologise; I did not hear the first part of the noble Baroness’s question because it was cut off, so I will respond in writing.

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, all supplementary questions have been asked, and we now move on to the third Oral Question.

EU: Fishing Industry Negotiations *Question*

12.29 pm

Asked by Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what discussions they had with representatives of the fishing industry in the United Kingdom during negotiations for the United Kingdom-European Union Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con) [V]: My Lords—[*Inaudible*.] During the negotiation of the trade and co-operation agreement, Ministers and officials met frequently with representatives of the fishing industry, including the National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation, to update them on the negotiations and discuss their views on them.

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon (Lab): I thank the Minister for his Answer. The issue of fisheries was raised in your Lordships’ House last Thursday. The end of December 2020 saw us leaving the EU, and during that time, we had a rolling commentary on the Brexit negotiation on fisheries and how we would be taking back our waters. The truth is we have not—not to the extent that fishermen thought we would. Did members of the fisheries organisations take part in the Brexit negotiation? Does the Minister think that if they had been part of the negotiation, it would have had a better outcome? The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations had written to the Prime Minister on this matter back in February—

Noble Lords: Too long!

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: [*Inaudible*.] The noble Lord, Lord Frost, and other Ministers and officials were in close touch with the fishing interests. The trade co-operation agreement has made some progress, increasing quota, ensuring regulatory autonomy and no tariffs, and controlling access to fish in our waters.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern (Con) [V]: My Lords, have the difficulties been resolved with the health of shellfish being sent to Europe and with sending Scottish seafood to the EU, particularly in respect of consignments made up from more than one source?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, there is an overall improvement in the situation, but we all agree that more work needs to be done. That is why Defra has invited exporters to in-depth workshops, 11 of them in the past few weeks, on issues including export health certificates. We are also working closely with the Scottish Government, Food Standards Scotland and other government departments to learn from the establishment and operation of existing hubs in Scotland. Although the situation is improving, we in Defra and other government bodies are doing considerable work.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, there is an immediate, pressing problem for many of our fishermen, who are suffering. What are Her Majesty’s Government doing to increase fish consumption in the domestic market? Do we need a fish and chips tsar or someone to encourage people to eat fish? More importantly, in the negotiations with the EU, will the Government work towards a flexible arrangement that allows for better quota swaps?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, we will be pragmatic and we will work robustly with the EU and, indeed, with Norway and the Faroe Islands.

Importantly, Defra and Seafish are working together on the Love Seafood campaign precisely to encourage the domestic consumption of excellent fish that hitherto we may not have consumed.

Baroness Quin (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the situation seems to make a mockery of the Prime Minister's claim that his Brexit deal would involve

"no non-tariff barriers to trade."

May I take up with the Minister the worrying situation in my local port of North Shields, which is England's biggest prawn port and heavily dependent on exports to France and Spain, where trade continues to be severely disrupted by delays, complicated red tape and, in some cases, prohibitive extra costs?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, I would like the noble Baroness to let me have further details on this issue, which I will speak to the Fisheries Minister about, because we are having daily conversations with, for instance, the French embassy. I would like to hear more about the situation in North Shields; our task is to resolve these matters.

Lord Teverson (LD) [V]: My Lords, many parts of the industry are heading for bankruptcy, yet within the agreement we have the mechanism of a Specialised Committee on Fisheries, which has not yet met. The Minister, Victoria Prentis, recently said:

"Details on how the committee will function will be communicated once they are finalised."

This is not good enough. Surely, the Government need to pull their finger out. In this third month of Brexit, when is this specialised committee actually going to meet?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, until the TCA has been ratified in the European Parliament, the Partnership Council and its specialised committees will not start to function. We in the UK are ready for them to be operational and are making our plans.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab) [V]: My Lords, in February last year the Secretary of State wrote to the EU Commissioner raising concerns about its decision to ban the import of class B live bivalve molluscs. In a subsequent letter to food exporters, dated 10 December 2020, it was confirmed that exports of these molluscs would be prohibited. So, why did the Secretary of State claim in a parliamentary Statement this January that he had only recently been made aware of the situation, when, seemingly, he had known and done nothing about it for a year?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, I will look into this because that is entirely contrary to my understanding, which is that the European Commissioner made it clear that this was an acceptable trade. We were most surprised to hear that the export of live bivalve molluscs from class B waters would not be accepted. We think that that is not well founded in law and we have sought a meeting with Commissioner Kyriakides on this matter.

The Earl of Shrewsbury (Con): My Lords, will my noble friend join me in condemning recent illegal operations carried out by Greenpeace: dumping large boulders in shallow fishing waters, potentially causing great risk to fishing vessels and their crews? Can he assure me that adequate resources are being and will be made available to ensure effective protection of the UK's fishing waters and fleet?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, everyone should take note of and abide by the regulations. The actions by Greenpeace within the Brighton Offshore Marine Conservation Zone are subject to a live investigation by the Marine Management Organisation. The Government have significantly increased the number of personnel and surveillance assets dedicated to fisheries protection.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, the Scottish seafood industry is world class but it has been let down by the lack of preparation for implementing this agreement beyond the negotiations, and by the political polarisation of the Scottish and UK Governments whenever these matters are discussed. Has the department, or the UK Government as whole, learned any lessons from this disaster? Will they seek a much more understanding, partnership-based, mutually respectful relationship with the Scottish Government in the future?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: My Lords, again, I am interested in what the noble Lord has said because my experience, certainly at Fisheries Councils, is of strong collaboration between all the devolved Administrations. The Secretary of State has had regular dialogue with Fergus Ewing and that will continue, because we have a mutual interest in advancing the export and domestic consumption of excellent products from both Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD) [V]: My Lords, there is a balance to be struck between a thriving fishing industry and the conservation of fish stocks. The network of marine protected areas is at risk. Information from Greenpeace shows that destructive fishing boats spend hundreds of hours fishing inside places that are meant to be protected. While I do not condone the actions of Greenpeace, it is true that bottom trawlers and scallop dredgers are ripping up protected seabeds with impunity. What are the Government doing to correct this?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con) [V]: We are ensuring through our sustainability objectives that all of the marine environment in the UK system is protected. That is what we intend to do, and that is why there were deliberations on the now enacted Fisheries Bill. We will be working on ensuring an improvement in our marine ecosystem.

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. We now come to the fourth Oral Question.

COVID-19 Vaccine Certification Question

12.40 pm

Asked by **Lord Harris of Haringey**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by the Prime Minister on 23 February (HC Deb, col 627), when they will provide further details of their review of the potential role of COVID-19 vaccine certification; and what organisations will be involved in that review.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord True) (Con): My Lords, as set out in the Covid-19 response document published last week, the Government will review whether Covid status certification could play a role in reopening our economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. My right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will lead the review, and he is currently considering the approach to its conduct.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab) [V]: Covid passports would make things easier for travellers, care homes, venues and businesses, but there are also concerns about confidentiality and straying into making vaccines compulsory. Proper consent for any system of certification is vital, and the Government need to consult on this quickly and widely. How will that be done? There are also other issues, such as the risks of forgery and of people borrowing other people's certification. How will those inspecting a Covid passport know, in the absence of a proper ID card or identity assurance system, whether the person presenting it is who they say they are and whether the certification applies to that person?

Lord True: My Lords, the noble Lord rightly sets out a number of issues that will have to be considered as the review goes forward. As the Prime Minister has said, there are deep and complex issues that we need to explore. We shall certainly draw on outside advice and opinion as we go forward.

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): I call the noble Lord, Lord Triesman. He is not here, so I call the noble Lord, Lord Scriven.

Lord Scriven (LD) [V]: My Lords, how will the Government mitigate the risk that introducing vaccine certificates will move toward a system of individual risk-scoring that could undermine public health by treating a collective problem as an individual one and reduce compliance with vital individual public health measures?

Lord True: My Lords, again, the noble Lord raises important considerations. As I have said, my right honourable friend is currently scoping areas for the review, and many issues will come up on both sides of the question, which will have to be carefully weighed. I can assure the noble Lord and others that Covid status certificates would not be a form of national identity card.

Lord O'Shaughnessy (Con) [V]: My Lords, last month the Ada Lovelace Institute published a report on the potential of vaccine passports. Among other recommendations, it called for the Government to engage with the public on this topic in order to build trust and legitimacy and also to understand what trade-offs the public are willing to make. What plans do the Government, and the review in particular, have to engage with the public so that we can build trust, not distrust, around status certificates?

Lord True: Again, there are obviously two strands here. There is the strand of international discussion about enabling international travel, which is subject to a review being conducted by my right honourable friend Mr Shapps, and there is the current review addressing the issues that noble Lords have been speaking about. As I have said, these are very early days—the review was announced only last week—but, as the Prime Minister said, we will seek the best scientific, moral, philosophical and ethical viewpoints on the way forward. Obviously, public opinion will be part of that.

Lord Loomba (CB) [V]: My Lords, a Covid variant first identified in Brazil has been found in the UK. Some variants, like this one, appear to be more contagious, and there are concerns that current vaccines may not work as well against them. The UK Government have already announced a deal with the biopharmaceutical company CureVac to develop vaccines against future variants, with a pre-order of 50 million doses. Can the Minister tell us what steps the Government will take to ensure that no vaccine will be approved unless the expected high standards of safety, quality and effectiveness are met as those new vaccines will be developed in as short a time as possible?

Lord True: My Lords, obviously I am not the lead Minister on vaccines, but what I do know, and I think the public know, is that our standards in this country in terms of assessing vaccines are among the highest in the world, if not the highest. The Government would never in any circumstances do anything that would jeopardise the safety of the public.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): On Monday the European Union announced plans for a digital green pass that will provide proof that a person has been vaccinated against Covid-19, as well as details of tests, and will "facilitate Europeans' lives". Are Her Majesty's Government in discussion with the Commission about this—about working together—and will it be part of the proposed consultation?

Lord True: My Lords, as I say, there is a parallel strand here. The review that was announced is of the potential domestic application of Covid certification; the review of international travel is a separate strand. I can repeat what I have said before at this Dispatch Box: the Government are talking to all partners internationally about the work of trying to facilitate international travel when it is safe to do so. Obviously, we have to respond to the fact that other countries may decide that people need to show vaccinated status

as a requirement for entry, but the Government are not currently looking to make it a requirement to have a vaccination certificate to come into this country.

Baroness Walmsley (LD) [V]: My Lords, in considering whether to introduce vaccine certification, will the Government consult organisations representing patients who have been advised by their clinician that it would not be in their interest to take the vaccine? How would such patients be able to navigate a world in which vaccine certification was widely used?

Lord True (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness, as ever, raises a very important and sensitive point. The Prime Minister has said that we cannot discriminate against people who, for whatever reason, cannot have the vaccine. I assure her that the review will certainly take that aspect into account.

Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, I draw attention to my interests in the register. I want to return to the vaccination certificate on a domestic issue, following on from the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley. Can the Minister ensure that, whatever system we end up with, it is very narrowly and clearly defined and has the consent of those who are excluded from its benefits as well as those who would derive benefits from having such a certificate?

Lord True (Con): The noble Baroness makes an important point. As I have tried to indicate in this series of answers—I said at the outset that my right honourable friend is currently scoping the approach—your Lordships’ advice through all this will be very much valued and a range of opinions, including those just expressed, will have to be considered. As the Prime Minister has said, deep and complex issues are involved.

Lord Pickles (Con) [V]: My Lords, in those various discussions, will my noble friend consider the plight of a family travelling together where the adults are vaccinated and have a certificate but the children, including adolescents, are not? Is there a concern that a modern Morton’s fork is created, so that the efficiency and effectiveness of any certificate is undermined identically whether the accompanying children have a Covid-19 test or not? Has my noble friend noted that this dilemma in countries which use a vaccine certificate domestically has resulted in the certificate having only a marginal impact?

Lord True (Con): My Lords, again, my noble friend brings forward an issue—the situation of a family with children, whether in a pub or travelling—which will have to be considered and addressed. I assure him that his point will be taken into account.

Baroness Bull (CB): Will the Minister ensure that the review considers the impact of introducing vaccine certificates on the cultural and entertainment sectors, and both the commercial and the ethical implications for them? Any form of passporting will likely impact disproportionately on those communities already excluded, and the integration of health data into cultural

participation is a worrying shift from the social to the medical model of disability. Can the Minister confirm the review will include a full equality impact assessment?

Lord True (Con): My Lords, as I have said, my right honourable friend is currently scoping the approach to the review. On the point made by the noble Baroness, I repeat what the Prime Minister said: we will reach out to get the best moral, philosophical and ethical viewpoints on this issue. That will include all the points raised in this House today.

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. That brings Question Time to an end.

12.50 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19 Update Statement

The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Tuesday 2 March.

“Today marks 12 weeks since Margaret Keenan became the first person in the world to receive a clinically approved vaccine for Covid-19. She has since been joined by over 20 million other citizens of this country in the biggest and fastest vaccination effort the world has ever seen.

This is a phenomenal achievement. Our vaccination programme is a national success story for the whole United Kingdom, and the reason it matters is that it allows us to replace the protection currently given by restrictions on our freedoms with the protection from science.

The data confirms that this strategy is working because the vaccines work. The number of hospital admissions is falling faster than the number of new cases, whereas in the first peak it fell more slowly, and the fall in hospitalisations is faster among the age groups vaccinated first than in younger age groups yet to get a jab.

I can tell the House about some further analysis that backs up this excellent news. The halving time of hospital admissions is now every 18 days. Over the past fortnight, it has fallen for those aged over 85 from 18 days to 15. This morning, the Office for National Statistics published data showing the number of deaths falling by over a quarter a week in mid-February. More than that, the number of deaths each day is not only falling faster than after the first peak, but it is falling faster in the over-80s, who got the jab first, compared with the under-80s. The number of daily deaths is halving every 12 days, but among the over-80s it is now halving every 10, so while the fall in cases is decelerating, the fall in the number of deaths is accelerating. What all this shows is that the vaccine is working, reducing the number of deaths among those who were vaccinated first and preventing hospital admissions. This is real-world evidence that the vaccine

[LORD FOWLER]

is protecting the NHS and saving lives, that the 12-week dosing regime is saving lives, and that this country's strategy is working.

As well as this real-world data, I would like to update the House on two new pieces of analytical research published over the last 24 hours. First, this morning the Office for National Statistics published new data on the levels of protection people have. They show that up to 11 February, one in four people is estimated to have antibodies against coronavirus in England, up from one in five. The levels are highest in the over-80s, the first group to be vaccinated, showing again the protection from the vaccine across the country. The second piece of research, published last night, shows that a single dose of either the Oxford or the Pfizer vaccine delivers protection against severe infection in the over-70s, with a more than 80% reduction in hospitalisations. It is great news that both vaccines work so effectively. In fact, the protection from catching Covid 35 days after the first jab is even slightly better for the Oxford jab than for the Pfizer, so people can have confidence that they will get protection, whichever jab they are offered.

I am grateful for the work of colleagues across the House in promoting vaccine take-up, which has helped to deliver some of the highest levels of enthusiasm for vaccination in the whole world, and I am pleased to inform the House that we are now inviting over-60s to be vaccinated too. Although the day-to-day figures for supply are lumpy, we have some bumper weeks ahead later this month. Given that our vaccination programme began 12 weeks ago today, from now we begin in earnest our programme of second vaccinations, which ramps up over the month of March. I can assure the House that we have factored these second jabs into our supply projections, and we are on track to meet our target of offering a vaccine to all priority groups 1 to 9 by 15 April and to all adults by the end of July.

Our vaccination programme means that we can set out our road map to freedom and put this pandemic behind us, but we must stay vigilant because Covid-19, like all viruses, mutates over time. Part of controlling any virus is responding to new variants as they arise, just as we do with flu each year. Knowing this, we invested in genomic sequencing right at the start of the pandemic, giving the UK one of the biggest genomic sequencing capabilities in the world. Thanks to that, we have been able to spot variants here at home and support others to detect variants in other parts of the world.

I would like to update the House on the six cases of the variant of concern that was first identified in Manaus in Brazil and that we have now identified here in the UK. We know that five of those six people quarantined at home, as they were legally required to do. We have been in contact with them, and I would like to put on record my gratitude to them for doing their duty and following the rules. Whenever we identify cases of a new variant, we respond fast and come down hard by bringing in enhanced sequencing and testing, so we are stepping up our testing and sequencing in South Gloucestershire as a precaution. We have no information to suggest that the variant has spread further.

Unfortunately, one of the six cases completed a test but did not successfully complete the contact details. Incidents like this are rare and occur only in around 0.1% of tests. I can update the House with the latest information on identifying this case. We have identified the batch of home test kits in question, and our search has narrowed from the whole country down to 379 households in the south-east of England. We are contacting each one. We are grateful that a number of potential cases have come forward following the call that we put out over the weekend, and I would like to thank colleagues from across the House who have helped us to get the message out there.

Our current vaccines have not yet been studied against this variant. We are working to understand what impact it might have, but we do know that the variant has caused significant challenges in Brazil, so we are doing all we can to stop the spread of this new variant in the UK, to analyse its effects, to develop an updated vaccine that works on all these variants of concern, and to protect the progress that we have made as a nation. This country is on the road to recovery and we have freedom on the horizon. We must proceed with caution because although we are moving quickly, the virus moves quickly too. Let us not waver; let us do whatever it takes to keep this virus under control."

1.01 pm

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for this Statement. I agree with the Statement in congratulating the NHS on its rollout of the vaccine, which continues to be a huge cause for optimism and hope, as does the science and research, in which the UK has played a leading role. However, we are still the country that has the third highest number of deaths in the world, at 124,000. Given the success of the vaccine and the strength of our science base, that is dismal. It must at least in part be attributed to decisions that the Government have taken or not taken, the failure of test and trace to do the job that we need it to do and the porous nature of our borders, on which we have again seen decisions taken too little, too late.

The concern about new variants means that, if the UK does not get on top of them, the valiant efforts of our NHS, our scientists and the vaccine could be terribly undermined. In January and February, cases here were running at tens of thousands a day and we were in lockdown, as we still are, because of our home-grown, new infectious variant. Nevertheless, people were allowed to fly in from abroad, bringing the P1 Brazilian mutation with them. Throughout history, epidemic after epidemic has exploited international travel. Surely it is obvious that tougher border controls should have been in place sooner.

The Brazilian variant cases arrived a month ago. They showed the problems of delays as well as the limitations of the pre-travel tests that did not catch those cases. Even now, 99% of the 15,000 daily arrivals are not covered by hotel quarantine. Most people can still travel home from the airport by Tube, train or even plane, mixing with others, as some of these travellers did, without being tested on arrival in the UK. Why are the Government still refusing to introduce additional tests on arrival and still allowing international passengers to travel onward on UK public transport?

Does the Minister recognise that those gaps in the system will let more new variant cases spread? Is it also the case that there is a risk of cross-infection at airports where congestion is occurring? I understand that yesterday there were queues that lasted for several hours at Heathrow. What are the Government going to do about this? It is shocking that people are mixing, having arrived from a list of countries at risk, instead of going straight into hotels for isolation.

Of course, I welcome the progress that the Government have made in identifying the batch of tests from which that of the missing infected person came, but how on earth can a test be processed that does not collect contact details? What mechanisms have been put in place to fix that for the future? Some £22 billion have been allocated to this system, but it feels as though someone has vanished into thin air. How is the hunt for this person proceeding? Can the Minister assure us that this will not happen again?

Is there any information suggesting why this variant is spreading? The Minister might recall that John Edmunds from SAGE told the Home Affairs Select Committee in January that for every identified South African variant case, there were probably another 30 that had not been identified. Can the Minister tell the House, therefore, whether he has received any estimates of the number of unidentified cases in the wider community?

We are in a race against the evolution of this virus, so we have a long way to go. To be frank, nowhere is Covid-safe until everywhere is Covid-safe. None of us wants to yo-yo in and out of lockdown, so will the Minister guarantee that the lockdown easing will, as promised, be absolutely based on data, not dates, and that the assessment time between each step will not be compromised?

I welcome the extra surge in testing, but what is the current timeframe for genetic sequencing? How can it be speeded up? What steps will be taken to ensure that areas such as Ashfield, Leicester, Watford, Worthing and Hyndburn are not left behind when the national lockdown restrictions begin to lift, or will those places be put in localised lockdowns? Will the local authorities there be given extra resources to do more door-to-door testing and retrospective tracing? Will workplaces in those areas be inspected by the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that they are Covid-secure? Will people finally be given decent sick pay and isolation support?

On the Budget, it beggars belief that it did not include any detailed plans for the NHS. Indeed, the OBR highlights this, saying:

“The Government’s spending plans make no explicit provision for virus-related costs beyond 2021-22, despite its Roadmap recognising that annual vaccination programmes and continued testing and tracing are likely to be required.”

We know that the last reorganisation of the NHS cost £3 billion and that does not seem to have been put into the Budget either. Can the Minister explain how the NHS will catch up with the enormous backlog that has been created, as well as the ongoing pandemic-related costs? This is an urgent question.

It has also emerged that the Government appear to have delayed social care reforms until 2022, with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Stephen Barclay, telling

campaigners that plans for sustainable improvement will only come next year. In January, the Prime Minister told Parliament that the Government would bring forward plans later this year, so will the Minister confirm whether it is this year or next year or when they actually intend to launch reforms on social care?

Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]: My Lords, from these Benches we, too, congratulate everyone involved in the vaccination process, including our brilliant teams of scientists, both in this country and abroad, who have been working—and continue to work—tirelessly on safe and effective vaccines for the world. We also congratulate the teams who are organising and managing the supply chains and all of those on the front line delivering jabs in arms, or supporting them to make it possible to reach the target of 20 million doses achieved this week. We will also not forget everyone working on Covid at the moment, whether front-line staff in health and social care or back-office staff who may not be visible to us but who are making sure that all these processes are working. We thank them all.

It is reassuring to hear that the second jab supply chain has been factored in, but can the Minister please tell the House if the supply chain and vaccination dose capacity is also protected for the next priority groups due to receive their first dose? This is critical to lifting lockdown.

It is good news that the clinical trials under way since before Christmas are demonstrating that the over-80s are developing good antibodies to resist the coronavirus and that this is now evident in the data. It is fascinating to see the vaccine gap in graphs, showing that there is a much steeper decline in cases in the over-75s than there is in the under-60s. It is also encouraging to see reports that there have been very few side effects to both the AZ and the Pfizer vaccines. Can the Minister say if this information will be used to encourage those who have so far refused their first dose?

The Octave trial, funded by the Medical Research Council, is now under way, assessing whether those people with compromised immune systems are able to make antibodies. It was reassuring to read the details of this trial from some participating universities and university hospitals and I am grateful that Professor Chris Whitty was able to outline this project in a briefing to parliamentarians recently. I had understood it to be well under way already, although the press release makes it sound as if it is much more recent and still recruiting. Can the Minister say when the Octave trials are likely to publish their results, given that many people currently shielding are anxiously waiting for them?

The Statement refers to the Brazilian P1 variant and to the case of the individual who had not completed their form correctly. There has been silence over the last couple of days, and I wondered whether the Minister could update the House on the search for this individual. As I raised earlier this week, can the Minister help the House to understand why such an issue was able to happen at all? Is it correct that there are no processes in place to ensure that, as people come into the UK, border agency staff check their passports against the online forms completed in advance, so that personal details, such as addresses, are visible? The

[BARONESS BRINTON]

noble Lord, Lord Balfe, made it plain—as have many others travelling into the UK—that these checks are rarely made, if at all.

Is it correct that local health and resilience forums are not given any details of people quarantining in their areas? This is important to ensure that care support teams would be able to check and provide help for those quarantining if they have any concerns. That might have helped with this particular case: a traveller from Brazil feeling unwell would have had a local contact to talk to about what to do.

Finally, as we wait to see if cases, hospitalisations and deaths have reduced enough to start lifting lockdown carefully in April, can the Minister respond to the report published today showing that test and trace has barely used the check-in app data from visitors to pubs, restaurants and hairdressers, resulting in thousands of people who have been checked in not being warned that they might be at risk of infection? The report states that the Department of Health and Social Care has noted that more than 100 million people have checked into venues since it went live in the autumn, but only 284 alerts have been sent to 274 venues—not 274,000 venues, just 274. Worse, the report says that the lack of guidance for local resilience forum trace teams on how to use the data has left businesses being asked to, or volunteering to, contact customers and visitors, which is technically a breach of GDPR and leaves those businesses and venues open to potential legal challenge.

After spending £40 million on the contact tracing app, encouraging the public to act responsibly, and the department saying today:

“The NHS COVID-19 App is an important tool in our pandemic response”,

can the Minister tell us which of these statements are true? Can he confirm that the guidance given to local authority health departments on how to use the data to notify people from the app is in full compliance with GDPR legislation? Is the figure of only 274 venues receiving alerts correct—yes or no? What steps are the Government taking to remedy this before pubs, restaurants, hairdressers and non-essential retail begin to open again?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con): My Lords, I am enormously grateful for the questions from both the noble Baronesses, Lady Thornton and Lady Brinton. I start by echoing both their tributes to those involved in the rollout of the vaccine. It is a remarkable national achievement and we should all be enormously proud. My own wife was vaccinated last week, and she told me that she cried as she left the GP’s surgery—so moved was she by the experience. That is something I have heard many times before.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, paid tribute to all those involved in science and research, and I absolutely agree. This has been a remarkable moment for British science. We will start celebrating British Science Week tomorrow, and I cannot think of a more apt moment to do that.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked about the highest number of deaths. There are a number of reasons. Before I move on, I mention that today is

World Obesity Day, and one of the most telling pieces of research that has come out in recent weeks is the work of PHE. We must all reflect on the nation’s health and whether obesity has played a role in Britain’s higher incidence of mortality. I look forward to reflecting on this issue more in the future.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked directly about the decisions that the Government have made, test and trace, and the borders. Let me tackle those head on. On the decisions that the Government have made, I share with the Chamber that the road map announced by the Prime Minister has landed extremely well. It is extremely conservative. It puts school openings first, which is undoubtedly the feedback we have had from both parents and the country at large. The easing of measures for the rest of the economy and civic activity is based entirely on the data that emerges from the infection rates and will be done in a way that contains the spread of the virus.

I reassure the noble Baroness that the test and trace operation has developed remarkable capacity, and both the turnaround times for the testing and the effectiveness of the tracing have now emerged as being fantastic. The tracing of the Brazilian variant pays tribute to the effectiveness of the test and trace operation, as does Project Eagle, which has been mainly focused on the South African variant. We believe that the spread of the South African variant has been largely contained by the tracing of the Project Eagle team working closely with local authorities and infection control teams around the world. It shows what we can do with this remarkable resource.

With regard to borders, the “red list” and managed quarantine system has been stood up in an extremely effective way. The families in south Gloucestershire and Aberdeen isolated themselves, as they should have done, and the handling of their variant of concern has been professional. I am led to believe that progress is being made on tracking down our Brazilian friend, the one stray person with the disease.

In answer to the question of how someone could have a test without filling in the form, we believe that there are two ways in which that could happen. Someone could walk up to a testing site, have their test but not fill in the form properly, or they could have had the test sent to them in the post and returned it without filling in the correct form. There are lessons to be learned from both potential models, and we are communicating with those who provide tests to ensure that barcodes are put on all tests.

We have to run a risk-based analysis on cross-infection at airports and infection control within airports. We could close all airports—that could be one way of doing it—but, under the circumstances, I applaud both the airlines and the airports for putting in mitigation and hygiene measures which the CMO’s office believes will be effective.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked about sequencing. We have stood up an enormous amount of new sequencing—30,000 samples a week is our current capacity—and we have dramatically reduced the time it takes to do sequencing. The biggest problem with that is transporting the samples around the country, and therefore we are looking at distributing sequencing

capacity to the Lighthouse laboratories so that once a sample tests positive, it can be automatically taken to a plate to be sequenced at the same location. We believe that that could make a big impact.

One lesson from Project Eagle I share with the House is that door-to-door tracing is quite effective, but by far the most effective means of tracing has been intelligence-led tracing. The noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, asked about the check-in data, and this has been its power: it has allowed us to trace those who may have bumped into others in, for instance, areas of hospitality. It is not the objective of that check-in data to send out alerts to large numbers of people who may have been present in a location; it is more about empowering the forensic contact tracing necessary to track down potential connections.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked about NHS plans. I will focus on one particular area and one of the lessons we have had from recent weeks. We have done an enormous amount to contain the spread of disease and we have seen—partly because of the lockdown, partly because of the wearing of masks, partly because of hygiene—a dramatic reduction in the amount of flu and gastroenteritis across the country. It is not an unrealistic ambition to hope that NHS resources could and should be focused on reducing contagious diseases across the piece and use the lessons from testing, hygiene and diagnostics generally to massively reduce the impact of contagious diseases. That will have huge benefits to the capacity of the NHS to combat sickness and ill health generally.

I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, for her kind remarks on the contribution of those in the back office of the NHS. I am sometimes admonished by those who say that there is simply too much white-collar, managerial wastage in the NHS. I do not accept that criticism, and the rollout of the vaccine shows the immense management muscularity at the NHS which is able to organise such a huge national programme with such efficiency and courtesy.

The noble Baroness asked about clinical trials. I celebrate the fact that the large amount of really encouraging evidence that we have had has vindicated the decision by the JCVI, the MHRA and the CMO to prioritise the first dose over the distribution of second doses and to bring in the 12-week gap. That was a wise, pragmatic and impactful decision and we thank those involved.

The noble Baroness is entirely right that the large take-up among older people will have a big impact on younger people. The most influential people in anyone's life are the people whom they love and live with. I cannot think of a better way of marketing it to younger people than the older people whom they love and live with taking the vaccine.

I also pay tribute to Professor Paul Moss and the team at Octave who are working extremely hard on the impact of the vaccine on those with immune deficiency. As the noble Baroness alluded to, the work at the University of Birmingham is at pace. It has been going on for some months, and its impact is already being shared among professionals. I am not sure whether there is an official report planned, but I reassure her that the insight and intelligence from their work is being shared across the system.

Finally, I give enormous praise to all those currently working on our borders. The situation in other countries remains extremely concerning. Variants of concern are rising in many countries, and in Europe infection rates remain extremely high. We have put in place measures on our borders that have the capacity to protect us from these variants of concern and I am enormously grateful to all those concerned who have strengthened those positions.

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Lexden) (Con): My Lords, we now come to the 30 minutes allocated for Back-Bench questions. I ask that questions and answers be brief so that I can call the maximum number of speakers.

1.23 pm

Lord Lansley (Con): My Lords, the speed and scale of the vaccine rollout is indeed a remarkable achievement and reflects great credit to all involved. The House will have noted the publication this morning of the REACH study based on data from February. Among its findings was that there was some regional variation in prevalence, particularly in the later part of February. Will the Government on this basis consider regional variation in the pace at which restrictions are lifted, rather than necessarily assuming that it will be a uniform, national approach?

Lord Bethell (Con): My noble friend is entirely right to raise the issue of regional variation. It had been our profound hope to be able to adjust and to focus lockdown arrangements on geographical locations so that national measures were not the only tool in our toolkit. The evidence from last year suggests that the amount of travel that individuals do makes regional and local lockdowns only partially effective. This has put a massive question mark over the way in which we can use regional and local lockdowns. There is more work to be done to understand exactly how that works but he is right to raise it as a considerable issue.

Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB) [V]: My Lords, it is a great pleasure to congratulate the Minister on behalf of the Government on what has been achieved in lockdown. It is absolutely fantastic. I want to ask two questions. First, bearing in mind that some 20 million people have now been vaccinated, do the Government have any assessment of the number of people who still contract the disease after having had the vaccination? Secondly, do the Government have any idea about the relative impact of side-effects of the different vaccines?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I have nothing but good news on both those important issues. The number of people who have mild or profound sickness, need hospitalisation or die after having the vaccine is extremely small indeed. There is some differential when we come to the variants of concern. Certainly, mild disease has been observed with the South African variant by sources in South Africa and we are working to understand that. However, severe hospitalisation and death are massively reduced by all the vaccines. The side-effects from all the vaccines on all age groups and on people with almost all comorbidities are extremely small.

[LORD BETHELL]

The yellow list information published by the MHRA is extremely reassuring and so far it has been nothing but good news about the vaccines.

Lord Winston (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the House should be very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, who is constantly being bombarded with our questions. However, I point out that within six hours of entering a cell this virus will have replicated, leading to millions of copies. Some copies will be imperfect, the so-called variants. Time is of the essence. The risk of dangerous new variants to which we have no defence is eventually likely to be inevitable. Will the Government now answer the question that has been repeatedly asked both in this House and in the other place since Christmas: as the red list of presumed points of embarkation is ludicrous and ineffectual, why do the Government not ensure that all those tens of thousands we have heard about entering the UK daily are effectively separated, screened, tracked, traced and isolated where necessary before they are lost within minutes somewhere in a British city?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for his grim prognosis and I agree with his analysis. If there is one place in the world where a mutant variation is likely to happen, it will be in an area where you have high infection rates and a large amount of suppression of the virus by either a lockdown or a vaccine programme. If you look around the world, that country is most likely to be Britain. We must be on the balls of our feet to be prepared for unhelpful news on that front.

Can I reassure the noble Lord on the borders? The number of people travelling in and out of the UK has reduced dramatically and the traffic through our airports and seaports is down tremendously. The application of the red list programme is extremely effective and the use of quarantine hotels has been extremely rigorously enforced. The isolation, along with amber routes, has also had enormous resources and is much more effective than it once was. We are prepared to go further. We review the red list constantly and, should the threats mount up to being serious enough, we will extend the red list as far as necessary.

Baroness Sheehan (LD) [V]: My Lords, vaccines are key to getting us to a position where we can live with the virus, but we really must listen to scientists telling us that we must control the virus everywhere. While our support for the COVAX initiative is to be applauded, it cannot work effectively without reliable supplies of the vaccine. The Covid-19 Technology Access Pool is designed to do just that. Are we fully engaged in C-TAP?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, we are taking a leadership role in COVAX, CEPI, ACT, Gavi and all the international, multilateral initiatives to roll out vaccine around the world. We are looking at what to do with our own stock of vaccines, and the Foreign Secretary has made it very clear that distribution of the vaccines we have bought is very much on the agenda. The AstraZeneca vaccine is being used as probably the

default vaccine of choice around the world, as it is low-cost and easily distributed. Through our G7 chairmanship, we entirely support the agenda of preventing further pandemic by ensuring that vaccines are fairly and widely distributed around the world.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con) [V]: I join others in congratulating my noble friend and his colleagues on the brilliant success of the vaccine programme. However, why is everyone in the United Kingdom, on receiving the vaccine, not being issued with a card to show that they have had it?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, they are issued with a certificate. It is a digital certificate that is put in their patient record. In the modern day, that is by far the most effective way to ensure that people know that they have had the vaccine. A physical card has the potential for fraud. We have looked that extremely carefully, but we think the digital approach is the right one. Most people will receive a small card with their second dose appointment on it, but if my noble friend did not get one, I am sorry about that.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, following on from that question, the need for vaccination passports to travel abroad, discussed earlier, now looks very likely, including, of course, to the EU, which will have its own standard. All the talk is of a phone app, but will the Government ensure that a paper version will be provided which will be acceptable abroad? A significant minority of older people still do not have mobile phones, and why should OAPs have to buy one in order to travel?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, in this matter, we will be led by international standards, and collaboration with our neighbours is essential when it comes to matters of international travel. If a paper certificate is required for international travel, we will put in place arrangements for that. A huge amount of the work that goes on for foreign travel nowadays happens before you ever get anywhere near the airport to depart. Passenger locator forms, pre-testing and vaccination certificates are all necessary in order to book a ticket, and that is where, really, the responsibility of the individual lies.

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: My Lords, I add my congratulations to the NHS and the Minister for the rollout of the vaccine, but with continued concern about the mortality rates. Churches, clergy and chaplains have been very involved in pastoral care and in support of the dying and the bereaved, even when buildings have been closed. There is now big concern with Holy Week and Easter coming up. Can the Minister offer a roadmap for when singing by choirs and congregations will once again be allowed, with sufficient time to prepare?

Lord Bethell (Con): I am entirely sympathetic to the question posed by the right reverend Prelate. I cannot think of anything nicer than spending Easter at Salisbury Cathedral listening to the beautiful singing of the choir there. We will be led, however, by the public health practicalities on that. It has been one of the most heartbreaking aspects of this pandemic that

those who seek sanctuary through worship have not been able to join the rest of their community, but the practicalities of the spread of the virus are unavoidable, so we will be led by public health advice in this matter. I do not have a date for his roadmap, I fear, but his considerations are very much understood in the department.

Baroness Donaghy (Lab) [V]: I thank the Minister for his continuing patience on this subject, and I am sure he did not mean to sidestep the two questions from my noble friend Lady Thornton. One was about the cliff edge for the social care sector, where the special funding is due to come to an end in March, and the apparent delay before we solve our care sector problem until 2022. The second was about there being no mention of NHS funding in the Budget, despite the fact that the roadmap recognises that annual vaccination programmes and continued testing and tracing are likely to be required. Does he have anything to say about those two areas of social care and NHS funding?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, we would not ordinarily expect a big announcement on NHS funding at a Budget such as this, and the truth is that we are not through the woods yet. It is impossible to predict what funds the NHS will need this year or next until we are through this pandemic, and while we are spending time today taking pleasure in celebrating the vaccine, the honest truth is that danger is still around the corner and we do not yet know that we are truly through this. When we are able to say that for sure, it will be possible to take a moment to decide on NHS funding. In the meantime, we remain committed to our manifesto pledges on hospital building and on recruitment, and on both those matters, we have made an enormous amount of progress. The Prime Minister has been crystal clear about his commitment to social care funding reform, and he stands by that commitment.

Lord Taylor of Goss Moor (LD) [V]: My Lords, given the undoubted success in the UK of the rollout of the vaccination programme, on which all involved are to be congratulated, our attention must turn, as my noble friend Lady Sheehan said, to consider the global operation because this disease is a global issue, not a United Kingdom one. The United Kingdom cannot live normally without the security of knowing that it is being tackled successfully globally. Will the Government use their chairmanship of the G7 to put in place and publish a global response action plan that goes further than what we have seen already and certainly further than simply donating spare vaccines?

Lord Bethell (Con): The noble Lord puts it extremely well. We have four key themes in the health track of the G7. The first is pandemic preparedness in the round; the second is clinical trial data—that is an essential building block for pandemic preparedness; the third is medical data transfer—one thing we have tripped over repeatedly in our international collaboration on pandemic reform is the difficulty of sharing data; and the fourth is AMR, which is the threat on the horizon. If we have learned one thing from this pandemic, it is not to underestimate the threat from anti-microbial resistance.

Baroness Pidding (Con) [V]: My Lords, with the potential need for a rolling programme of booster injections or vaccination against new variants, can my noble friend tell the House what infrastructure is being planned so that we can protect our entire population for as long as is necessary?

Lord Bethell (Con): I am grateful to my noble friend for looking forward. She is entirely right: the experience of this vaccination programme cannot stop when we have finished the initial rollout and we have to look to the future. As I said in my opening remarks, I am extremely hopeful that this can be an inflection point where we double-up on our commitment to rid the country of as much contagious disease as we possibly can. That will include booster shots, to which my noble friend alluded. It will also include a greater commitment to flu shots, and we very much hope that we can increase dramatically the take-up of flu shots at all ages, to stop not only illness itself but transmission.

Baroness Bull (CB): Following on from the noble Baroness's question and the importance of overall and ongoing vaccination coverage, can the Minister say how many people living in the UK are not registered with an NHS GP and therefore cannot be contacted for vaccination? We know that socially excluded groups, such as rough sleepers, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and vulnerable migrants, are less likely to be registered, and there will be people registered only with a private GP. What assessment have the Government made of the scale of this challenge—how many people are affected—and what efforts are under way to find them and offer them vaccination?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness makes her point extremely well. It is an area that we have looked at extremely carefully. The proportion of people who are not registered is remarkably small, but the phenomenon does exist. For this particular vaccination round, we have put in procedures so that those who turn up at a GP or vaccination centre who are not registered can be registered on the spot, and I thank colleagues at NHS D, who have put the necessary arrangements into the NIMS programme to make that possible. There are also others who do not know their NHS number—well, an enormous number of them now do know it. That is one of the blessings of this vaccination programme. We are also working extremely hard to reach out to the people the noble Baroness alludes to—the homeless, the Roma community and those who are recent arrivals in the UK—to make sure that the vaccination is offered to absolutely everyone in the UK, whatever their immigration status, whatever their living arrangements and whatever their medical history.

Lord Sikka (Lab) [V]: My Lords, last month the High Court concluded that the Secretary of State acted unlawfully by failing to comply with the transparency policy. When did the Prime Minister become aware that the Government were failing to meet their policy, and will the Minister now provide this House with minutes of each Cabinet meeting at which the government failure was discussed?

Lord Bethell (Con): It was a regrettable administrative oversight; it was one that the Secretary of State has made it clear he would do again if it meant saving lives. I am not aware of it having reached the Cabinet.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, we should all be enormously grateful to those who have made the vaccination programme such a success. In our thanks, we should not forget Kate Bingham and her team. However, there are still inconsistencies. During the last lockdown, pre-vaccine, we could have services properly distanced in Lincoln Cathedral with a choir and a congregation. Post-vaccine, we cannot. Post-vaccine, we are still—I am back to my old hobbyhorse—allowing care home workers to attend to the most intimate needs of their patients having refused a vaccine. Can we have some consistency, please? I am grateful to my noble friend.

Lord Bethell (Con): I am grateful to my noble friend for his question and I echo his comments on Kate Bingham. However, my Lords, we are not post-vaccine; we are, at best, mid-vaccine. Vaccinating 20 million people is an enormous achievement but there is a hell of a long way to go. There is still an enormous amount of infection in this country; nearly half a million people, or thereabouts, have the disease. There are variants of concern being generated in this country, such as the Kent virus, and overseas, such as the Manaus virus. Until we are truly through this, we have to show restraint and make uncomfortable decisions, and we must ensure that the NHS is preserved and we save lives. That, I am afraid, remains our priority.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB) [V]: My Lords, British science is indeed to be celebrated, as is government support of it, in vaccine development, genome sequencing and disease-specific registries such as UK Biobank. Will the Government use that experience to establish a national Covid registry to bring together the four main groups of data referred to by the Minister in his reply to the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, to inform long-term planning to reveal links between new variants found on sequencing, different long-term complications, including long Covid, the risk factors behind it and other matters such as body-mass index, vaccine history and any associated other contagious diseases? Such a registry could act as a long-term public health research tool.

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness for her insightful question about the obscure but vital question of data architecture. If there is going to be one powerful legacy of this awful disease, it will be the way in which data helped drive medical research, medical insight and the treatment of individuals. I am not sure if we need a new registry, a national Covid registry; what we need is for our existing data to be able to talk to itself. I can tell the Chamber that we are making enormous progress on that. I pay tribute to the unsung heroes, the CTOs who meet weekly at the NHS data architecture meeting, an obscure but vital forum where an enormous amount of good work is done by NHSX, NHSD, test and trace and others in primary and secondary care who are working incredibly hard, so that if one takes a test

today, it goes into one's patient record tomorrow and can be used the day after by a researcher looking at long Covid, dexamethasone, recovery or whatever. This is how modern healthcare should work. We have not done it well enough to date. We are making great progress on it tomorrow and we must not stop.

Baroness Andrews (Lab) [V]: My Lords, like everyone else, I could not agree more that the NHS rollout has been absolutely brilliant. I should also say that the Minister has been resilient, and we all appreciate that. However, I return to what is a more uncomfortable subject, I suspect, and follow up the question on airport testing. The Minister said that far fewer people are travelling and that the pursuit of quarantine conditions is more effective than it was. Given that fewer people are travelling, is it not possible to do what my noble friend Lord Winston suggested and pursue those people through test and trace and airport testing, as many other countries are doing successfully? How can the Minister say that quarantine testing of people in self-isolation is more effective? Can he give us more details on that?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, for her questions. Perhaps I may tackle the specific question of airport testing, which has been raised a couple of times. The honest truth is that the arrival of families in south Gloucestershire and Aberdeen who had done a pre-flight test and subsequently developed symptoms demonstrates, I am afraid, that pre-flight and airport testing is not as effective as one would hope. If it were, we would not have to impose a 10-day testing regime with tests on the second and eighth days. That is the only rigorous way in which one can do it. It is estimated that airport testing catches perhaps between 10% and 20% of infection, and that is why managed quarantine is so important. The infection rate among those who arrive in the UK is high enough for us to be seriously concerned and to impose the kind of isolation that we have done. Until that infection rate is reduced, I am afraid that we have to look forward to managed quarantine and isolation being a part of the travel experience for some time.

Lord Dobbs (Con) [V]: My Lords, I add my congratulations to those offered to all those involved in a remarkable national achievement. It has also been a personal triumph for my noble friend and all his colleagues. However, perhaps I may pursue the question that my noble friend Lord Cormack raised a moment ago. An alarming proportion of Covid infections have been caught by patients in hospital and those inside care homes. Can the Minister elaborate on government plans to require those who work in the NHS and care homes to accept vaccination if they are to continue to work among such vulnerable people? Why are so many of them so reluctant? Does he agree that the trade unions have some nerve in describing any suggestion of that sort as bullying?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I completely acknowledge the concerns of my noble friends Lord Dobbs and Lord Cormack about nosocomial infection. Undoubtedly, infections caught onsite in Britain last

year and this year, and in every epidemic, are not only among the saddest forms of contagion but among the most dangerous. I want to reassure both my noble friends that we are absolutely focused on this point. It is, though, too early to make a call on professional mandatory vaccination. We have got through only the first 20 million people in the highest-risk and, therefore, the oldest age groups, and we have not moved through all the other age groups. The Cabinet Office is looking at this matter and has a review process in place. When that process has coughed up its findings, we will be in a position to debate the matter, and I look forward to that in due course.

Lord Dubs (Lab) [V]: My Lords, does the Minister agree that the success of the NHS vaccination programme is a tribute to the efficiency and success of the public sector, in contrast to some of the private organisations involved in other aspects of dealing with the pandemic? I want to put a specific question to the Minister. He used the phrase, “Until we are through this pandemic”. Would it not be more sensible to say that we may never be fully through this pandemic, so our planning must be based on the fact that we will have to continue with the vaccination programme as new mutations develop for many years to come? Would it not be better to look that far ahead?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I disagree completely with the noble Lord’s first point. The vaccine would not have happened without AstraZeneca and the other private companies that have produced, manufactured and delivered it, so I do not know where the public sector would have got its vaccines from. I completely reject that point.

I agree with his second point. I should not have said, “When we are through this pandemic” because we are going to live with its consequences for many years to come, and if it is not this pandemic, there may be others in the future. We have all, I think, taken on board the fact that in the modern world, there is a new, 21st century cost for the kind of global lifestyle that we have got used to, and that is the international spread of viruses. We can, I think, win the battle, but we will have to adapt. Learning how to do that is the challenge of this year.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB) [V]: I too would like to offer my congratulations to the Government on the speed and efficiency of the vaccine rollout. Due credit must be given to all our health professionals for their dedication in risking their own health in care homes and when visiting private houses. The sight of an end to the pandemic should not lead to smugness. We were caught ill-prepared when it began and, with environmental and climate change, along with the increasing movement of people, there will always be new threats. Does the Minister agree, as he has already hinted, that we should plan to use this experience to combat these new threats more effectively?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord for teeing up what I hope can be an insight about the future. We will have to work much more closely with our international allies and colleagues on this matter. We must invest in vaccines, therapeutics

and antivirals on a prophylactic basis to be ready for when the worst viruses, including coronaviruses, emerge. We will have to bring international flying standards up to a much higher level so that the spread of viruses when pandemics occur is kept under control. We will also have to put the necessary surgical capacity into our healthcare systems to ensure that they are much more resilient than they were in the past. These are just three examples of the kind of changes that are on the horizon. I am hungry to get on with them and I am sure we will have a fantastic impact in our battle against disease.

Lord Rooker (Lab) [V]: My Lords, did the Minister have time to watch the David Harewood documentary shown at prime time on BBC1 on Tuesday about the massive health inequalities in the UK, which of course the Marmot report and reviews have been documenting for a decade? Why have so many Covid deaths been among the poor and the BAME communities?

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, I am not an epidemiologist who can totally nail that question, but I recognise and acknowledge completely the assumption. This disease has hit the least advantaged the hardest, but trying to understand the correlation and causation of that is extremely difficult. The evidence so far suggests that some of these causes are to do with the environment: the houses that people live in, the circumstances of their employment and their behaviour within that employment. But some of this is about comorbidities and healthy lifestyles, as well as weight, which I mentioned earlier. These are all matters of grave community concern. We have to take an interest in the public health of the whole nation and we are only as strong as the weakest part. I agree with the noble Lord’s implication: this is a wake-up call for the whole country and we have to address the health of absolutely everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Lexden) (Con): My Lords, the time allowed for questions on the Statement has now elapsed.

Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2021

Motion to Approve

1.54 pm

Moved by Lord True

That the draft Order laid before the House on 1 February be approved.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord True) (Con): My Lords, I shall also speak to the Mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Coronavirus, Nomination of Candidates) (Amendment) Order in the same speech.

Perhaps I may say at the outset how much I look forward to the maiden speech of my noble friend Lord Hannan, who will address us shortly. The instruments brought forward today make sensible provision to

[LORD TRUE]

support the effective administration of elections. The mayoral and police and crime commissioner elections order amends the Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007, the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections Order 2012 and the Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017. The purpose of the order, following representations made by my noble friend Lord Hayward and others, is to reduce the number of signatures required on a nomination paper for a candidate in the police and crime commissioner, combined authority and single authority mayoral elections. It is intended to reduce the need for person-to-person contact ahead of the May elections, given the specific context of the current pandemic. Similar provisions relating to local councillor and London mayoral elections have been made in a separate order.

In making these changes, we have taken the approach that the candidates should obtain subscribers on the basis of two per local authority area, whether for a poll within a single local authority or for electoral areas that contain a number of local authorities. Single local authority mayoral candidates must obtain signatures from two electors instead of 30; candidates for police and crime commissioner elections must obtain signatures from a number of electors which is twice the number of local authority areas within that police area. This is instead of the current requirement of 100 electors. For example, under the changes, for the Devon and Cornwall police area, which has 12 local authority areas, a candidate will need to obtain 24 signatures. Combined authority mayoral or so-called metro mayoral candidates must obtain signatures from a total number of electors that is twice the number of local authority areas within the boundary of the area. For example, the Liverpool City Region has six authorities, so the total number of signatures needed is 12. These signatures must be obtained from two electors registered to vote in each local authority area within the mayoral area. Currently, 100 electors in total are required at a combined authority mayoral election.

In making these changes, the Government have responded, after consultation, to the concerns of the electoral sector, candidates and political parties that the need to collect a high number of signatures for nominations for a candidate in some types of poll would encourage an unhelpful and unnecessary amount of interaction, as well as complexity for candidates. While it is essential that candidates in a poll can demonstrate a clear amount of local support, we must balance the importance of democracy with the need to protect people in these unique circumstances.

As I have explained, we are not removing the signature requirements completely. It is important that there should remain a democratic check and balance for candidates to demonstrate a degree of local support from electors in their area. These provisions will remain in force until 28 February 2022 to support candidates in any by-elections that may occur in the coming months as we emerge from the pandemic. The elections in May 2022 will automatically revert to the standard rules.

I am grateful to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments for drawing this to the attention of the House. The committee considered that there are some

points where the drafting of the instrument and its Explanatory Note could have been clearer in certain respects. We welcome the views of the committee and are particularly interested to note its thoughts on how best to assist readers in understanding which provisions in an instrument will apply to different parts of the UK. We consider that the instrument takes a proportionate approach to a temporary rule change which has been introduced to reduce the number of face-to-face contacts required in the pandemic. I am gratified to see that the committee has agreed with the response of the Cabinet Office to its request for a memorandum has provided additional clarity.

We consider that it is clear from the context of the order itself when and to which elections it applies. However, in order to further aid clarity and certainty, we have published a note on GOV.UK on the order and its effect, particularly on the numbers of signatures required, and to assist candidates, their supporters and those administering elections. This includes tables that set out the number of subscribers needed for candidates standing at combined authority and London mayoral elections in England, and elections of police and crime commissioners in England and Wales. As I have explained, these are polls where the election is for an area covering a number of local authority areas and the tables set out the total number of subscribers that candidates will need in these areas, and whether a specific number is required from each constituent authority or not.

I now turn to the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2021, which I hope will be welcomed by your Lordships. It introduces a set of prescribed forms and forms of words translated into Welsh in respect of the range of other forms already in use, in English, at PCC elections. These are in addition to the Welsh versions of the ballot paper and nomination form for candidates that are already provided.

The form and forms of words prescribed by this instrument are for use in any police and crime commissioner election that takes place in Wales. The Welsh forms in the instrument cover various stages in the electoral process and include poll cards issued to electors, the postal voting statement completed by postal voters, the declaration to be made by the companion of a voter with disabilities, guidance for voters and forms completed by candidates and their agents.

Some forms are in Welsh only and others are bilingual, in Welsh and English. The forms that are prescribed in Welsh and English—for example, poll cards and postal voting statements—are to be used in the bilingual form in place of the English versions. Forms that are prescribed in Welsh only—for example, the candidate's consent to nomination form and the candidate's declaration as to election expenses—are to be made available in Welsh where the person completing the form, such as the candidate, prefers to communicate in Welsh rather than English. The order also provides a Welsh version of the forms of words setting out guidance for voters that appears in polling station voting compartments. The effect of the order is that the form of words appropriate to the number of candidates will be displayed.

We have consulted the Electoral Commission on the orders, and it is supportive of both. We have also had support for the changes to the nominations process from the Association of Electoral Administrators and in discussions with political party representatives via the Parliamentary Parties Panel. We also shared a draft of the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2021 with the Welsh Language Advisory Group, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and officials in the Welsh Government. There is broad support among these stakeholders for the proposed changes set out in these two instruments.

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Faulkner of Worcester) (Lab): The question is that this Motion be agreed to. I should have made it clear at the beginning that the time limit for this debate is one and a half hours. The first debate is on the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2021, and one other Motion later.

2.04 pm

Lord Hain (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord True, for his clear explanation. I too look forward to the maiden speech from the noble Lord, Lord Hannan—although we have disagreed fundamentally on Europe and will doubtless continue to do so.

The draft Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2021 is not controversial, and I support it. The Government have made it clear that consultees have included the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators, political parties, the Welsh Language Advisory Group, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and officials in the Welsh Government. But has the noble Lord or any of his ministerial colleagues talked directly to Welsh Government Ministers? I ask because that has often not happened on other issues. What did the Welsh Language Advisory Group say specifically? Were any modifications or large changes made as a result of its feedback?

I realise that the order sets out Welsh language versions of certain forms, and certain forms of words, to be used at police and crime commissioner elections in Wales, not least because only Welsh versions of the ballot paper and the nomination form for candidates at PCC elections in Wales have so far been covered in legislation, and other forms have not. The changes in this order follow pressure from electoral officials in Wales and Welsh language groups to bring consistency with other elections held in Wales over such matters as poll cards, postal voting and arrangements for voters with disabilities, and to ensure that all forms and guidance notes are bilingual, in Welsh and English, which is very welcome. The practice at previous police and crime commissioner elections was for the forms and arrangements to be left to local Welsh returning officers, using powers in Article 85 of the 2012 order, supported by guidance from the Electoral Commission.

Turnout in these PCC elections has been very poor indeed. In 2012, turnout averaged just 15.1% across all 40 police areas in England and Wales, measured as valid first preference votes as a proportion of the electorate.

There was a welcome rise in 2016 to 26.6%, but that is still a miserably low figure. Presumably, the Government have lumped them together with key English and Welsh elections in May, for example to the Senedd—the Welsh Parliament—and for the London Mayor, in order to increase turnout.

Although relations between the Welsh and UK Governments on the running of elections are generally constructive, the fact that the PCC elections are happening on the same day as the Senedd election is problematic. The Welsh Government would have preferred to consider all-postal voting or to have early voting centres for the Senedd elections, but these were effectively ruled out because the Cabinet Office would not agree to them for the PCC elections. Can the Minister please say why? Was it because, like Donald Trump, who also opposed such measures for early postal voting to encourage turnout during the pandemic, they actually do not want to make it easy for people to vote? Is that the reason? I hope not, because it was clearly Trump's reason.

Welsh Ministers are also pretty staggered that the UK Government have decided to permit not just leafleting but canvassing in England at a time when the advice is still to stay at home. Is it not extraordinary that we are saying to people, “You can't see your loved ones but if someone pops up on your doorstep from the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat parties, or Plaid Cymru, please have a chinwag with them”?

To be fair, the Cabinet Office Minister, Chloe Smith, has made it clear that this change to the guidance is for England only and does not apply to PCC elections in Wales in respect of canvassing and so forth, since campaigning rules are part of the devolved responsibility for public health. But, surely, it remains perverse that in England you cannot see your loved ones but you can see a political party representative on your doorstep. Perhaps the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord True, could enlighten us all about that in his reply. In the meantime, I am happy to support this order.

2.08 pm

Lord Thomas of Gresford (LD) [V]: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Hain, has put before me a mirage of Trump-like volunteers wheeling wheelbarrows of votes for police and crime commissioner elections; I wait for the day.

I very much welcome this instrument. It has to be emphasised that the use of Welsh in government forms strengthens confidence in the general use of the language. The Welsh Language Advisory Group is doing a very good job and the use of Welsh is widening. I am currently on an excellent course in improving my language skills with students not just from the locality but from Swansea to Devizes, Manchester and Edinburgh; that is one of the joys of Zooming.

These forms are written in formal Welsh, possibly with a touch of tafodiaith y gogledd about them—I sincerely hope that they can be understood all right further down there. Of course, Welsh is not spoken everywhere in Wales and the bilingual forms are valuable. In my part of Wales, the response to the intervention of the police is more likely to be in robust Anglo-Saxon. My father recalled patrolling Town Hill in Wrexham as a young policeman, with a new recruit from a

[LORD THOMAS OF GRESFORD]
 chapel-going, Welsh-speaking area further to the west. A local, tumbling out of the Vaults at closing time, started abusing them, Anglo-Saxon-wise. The new policeman took off his uniform jacket and handed it to my father, saying, in Welsh: “Here, Hywel, hang on to this. I’ve got my rights.” A fight broke out, with a crowd gathering around urging the local on while my father stood holding his mate’s coat. Those were the days of proper policing, before they invented those new-fangled police commissioners. History does not record what the magistrates said.

I look forward to the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Hannan, on this topic. We shall certainly be looking forward to the results of the next police commissioner elections in north Wales, wheelbarrows of votes of not, with a better-informed electorate.

2.11 pm

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere (Con) (Maiden Speech):

My Lords, it is a privilege to rise for the first time in this place among you. It can be somewhat unsettling arriving in the Palace of Westminster at the height of the lockdown and its associated restrictions. There are times, wandering down the empty corridors and seeing the black and yellow tape barring various entrances, when it feels almost post-apocalyptic, almost “28 Days Later”. But if the physical environment is necessarily sterile, the same cannot be said of the people. I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of noble Lords on all Benches, who have always taken time to help a new Member.

The same is true of the permanent staff. It is not uncommon on these occasions to thank Black Rod and her excellent team, and rightly so. They have conducted themselves through these difficult times with exemplary briskness, efficiency and good cheer. Similarly, the doorkeepers are often rightly thanked on these occasions. Already, I have had more than once had occasion to be grateful to them for their good humour and their good sense. Perhaps your Lordships might indulge me if I thank a third group, less-often thanked: the canteen staff. There have been occasions when I have found the sheer weight of the lockdown and the emptiness almost oppressive. A sure cure to that mood is to be steered towards the rock cakes by the smiling canteen staff.

Allow me also to thank two noble friends who introduced me and whom I am truly proud to call friends—my noble friends Lord Leigh of Hurley and Lord Borwick, two immensely charming men whose characters are superficially different but who both have that sincere charm that rests on largeness of character, generosity of spirit and an unfeigned interest in other people.

I come here after 21 years in the European Parliament. I am one of many such on all Benches; I lost count at about a dozen. It is fair to say that I was a little bit less popular in that chamber than some of my noble friends and some of the noble Lords opposite who served in Brussels and Strasbourg. I had a dear friend, a French MEP, a terrific federalist and a great believer in a united states of Europe, who used to tease me by quoting the Book of Genesis. He would say: “You’re like Ishmael, you’re a wild man, every man’s hand against you and your hand against every man’s.” I am

not sure that this was entirely true. Certainly I was in a minority in the European Parliament, but now, as that verse continues, dwelling among my brethren, like Ishmael, I look back and see that I have many friends, including great believers in a united states of Europe, with whom I have spent the past year Zooming disconsolately as we compare conditions in our various countries.

Throughout my time in Brussels, I saw my animating principle as being the diffusion, the decentralisation and the democratisation of power, which brings me to the debate before your Lordships today. I was given some advice before speaking. Somebody said that for your maiden speech you should pick an uncontroversial topic. He looked at me significantly, “You particularly, Hannan, should pick something uncontroversial.” I toyed with the idea of the Non-Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Bill, which we are due to debate next week. However, I felt that, in the current mood, that was too much of a hot-button issue and I did not want tempers to run high, so I have confined myself to the debate on today’s statutory instrument, which, as my noble friend the Minister ably set out, is about varying the number of signatures needed for police and crime commissioner candidates and about the use of the ancient, exquisite and euphonic Welsh language, which, as the noble Lord, Lord Thomas of Gresford, reminds us, is part of the glory of all of us in these islands.

Pericles, treated so often as a guru by the Prime Minister, said that great issues can arise from small questions. The issue of maintaining and strengthening local democratic control of police strikes me as a very great issue indeed. It is perfectly true, as the noble Lord, Lord Hain, pointed out, that turnout for police and crime commissioner elections has been disappointing. I feel the loss perhaps more than some in this Chamber, having been a very early advocate of the idea. In 2005, I wrote a book calling for what I then wanted to call sheriffs. I thought it great to revive the shrievalty as an institution. Eventually, in a very watered-down form, that idea took shape as policy.

I always quarrelled with the name “police and crime commissioner”. First, it is very boring. Secondly, it is technically inaccurate, making it sound as if you are the person in charge of the crime as well as in charge of the police. Thirdly, the commissioner is the opposite of an elected person, being someone who is given a commission. I took this question up with the then Police Minister, now my noble friend Lord Herbert. He said: “The trouble is, we focus-group tested it, and nobody liked ‘sheriff’. It sounded too American, too John Wayne—posses and stars and so on.” If that is true, what a sad comment it is on the ahistoricism of our country. Where on earth do people think that their cousins got the idea, the name and the institution from, if not from here?

I hope that with time we can strengthen the office, giving it not only more control over the police, but, ideally, the right to set local sentencing guidelines, while not interfering in particular cases. The answer to low turnout is to give more power and more meaning to the act of casting a vote in that election. As a general principle, we should strengthen and not weaken local democracy and local accountability. Perhaps this

country's proudest boast, the greatest gift that we have given to the happiness of mankind, is the idea that laws should not be passed, nor taxes raised, except by people who are answerable and that the people who pass and enforce the laws are in some way accountable to the people who are expected to obey them. That principle applies at local as well as national level. How to strengthen the police and crime commissioners—how to strengthen the shrievalty—is beyond the matter of this debate and well above my pay grade, but I hope that noble Lords will see an advantage nationally to us in trying to move towards greater local democracy and towards more purpose, meaning and honour in the act of casting a vote locally.

In many ways, your Lordships are the nation's institutional memory. This Chamber is a repository for the accumulated constitutional wisdom of centuries. That imposes a commensurate obligation on us to keep intact and to improve where possible the freedoms that we were privileged to inherit and to pass them on securely to our children.

2.19 pm

Lord Lilley (Con): My Lords, we have just had a taste of eloquent things to come. It gives me great pleasure to welcome my noble friend Lord Hannan and to be the first to congratulate him on his maiden speech.

He is well known to your Lordships as one of the intellectual architects of Euroscepticism. He won the respect of his opponents but, to the dismay of many, he does not fit their cherished caricature of Eurosceptics as insular, Europhobic ignoramuses. Far from being insular, he was not even born on this island. Like Paddington Bear, he hails from darkest Peru, though I suspect that the London terminus via which young Daniel was dispatched to his schooling was not Paddington but Waterloo. He is not just the Waterloo bear of British politics, but a member of that little-recognised species—the Europhile Eurosceptic. He speaks Spanish as well as French, is steeped in European culture, and is a notable Shakespearean scholar.

He has reminded me that I first met him in the early 1990s at the Oxford Union, during the annual no confidence debate. I followed his rapid rise to fame in this country and then in Europe, where, as an MEP, he quixotically devoted 21 years of his life to extricating this country from the EU and doing himself out of a job. His abiding passion is freedom—the freedoms we invented in this country. I advise all noble Members to read *How We Invented Freedom & Why It Matters*. It is about the freedom to govern ourselves and make our own laws—now largely achieved—and the freedom of trade as an engine of prosperity. I am sure he will make notable contributions on these issues in your Lordships' House.

I turn to the statutory instrument. The whole purpose of elected commissioners was to strengthen links between our citizen police force and the public. Requiring candidates for this office to demonstrate a measure of public support by obtaining a spread of nominations is one aspect of that. It is understandable that, during the pandemic, this requirement has been curtailed. Once the pandemic is over, it is important that it be reinstated.

It is fair to say that the institution of elected commissioners has been slow to gather active public participation, though it is growing, but it is salutary to remember how remote and unaccountable police authorities—and watch committees before them—were to the public prior to these commissioners. The police authority typically consisted of nine councillors. They had been elected, but not for the specific task of representing the public in supervising the police force. There were also eight lay independent members, chosen by the authority itself from a list vetted by the Home Office. In my experience, the result was a committee which was almost entirely captured by the police force that it was intended to supervise, so the force set its own priorities rather than having the public's priorities indicated to it. I recall the contemptuous way in which police authorities—in an echo of the police themselves—rejected public calls for more bobbies on the beat. They were unaware of the evidence from other Anglo-Saxon countries—or, when they were made aware, they rejected it—that bobbies on the beat, particularly if they patrol as individuals rather than in pairs and therefore have to talk to members of the public rather than to their colleagues, can be extremely effective both in garnering information and in deterring crime. As a result of the contempt with which that idea was held in professional areas and upheld by police authorities, police on the beat became as rare as cats' teeth.

This was always brought home to me when reading PG Wodehouse—which I do several times a year. In almost every novel, the hero will go out into the street and hail the nearest bobby. Now he would have to wait for months or weeks to do so in this country. I hope that the result of police commissioners will be to bring to police forces an awareness that the public value their services so much that they would like to see more of them.

2.24 pm

Lord Wigley (PC) [V]: My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hannan, on his maiden speech. I am sorry not to have been in the Chamber to enjoy it. I particularly welcome his warm words towards the Welsh language.

My contribution will be short, not least because some of the points have already been covered by the noble Lords, Lord Hain and Lord Thomas of Gresford. As Plaid Cymru currently has two of Wales's four police commissioners, I have a great interest in these matters.

I have two questions. The first is about the formulation of the Welsh language version. Can the Minister confirm that the wording which appears in the order has been run past precisely the same team as advised the Welsh Parliament on linguistic matters? From his introductory comments, I assume that this is the case, but I should be grateful for confirmation. I ask with a view to ensuring consistency in the usage of language—in particular, the treatment of gender. As colleagues may know—and some noble Lords participating today certainly do know—the Welsh language has gender-related nouns. Mutation is affected by the gender. In these days when we try to avoid unnecessary gender implications in texts which may relate to both males and females, we need to be particularly careful about this in the Welsh language formulation. My nose twitched in a couple of places in the text, but I shall be happy if

[LORD WIGLEY]

those more academically knowledgeable than me on linguistic matters have given their blessing to the wording before us today.

Secondly, the Minister will be aware that elections to the Welsh Parliament will probably take place on the same day as the election of the police commissioners. Those parliamentary elections—and their regulations—are devolved to the Welsh Government and Parliament. The provisions made by the order to help certain groups cast their vote for police commissioners by means other than attending the voting booth may be different to the provisions made by the Welsh Parliament for its electoral purposes. With the two elections taking place on the same day, this could—at the very least—be confusing. How much co-ordination has there been between Westminster and Cardiff Bay to ensure that the two approaches are at least consistent, mutually compatible and not contradictory? I should appreciate the Minister's response to both these points.

2.27 pm

Lord Morris of Aberavon (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his explanation of the orders. Having said that, we must never forget the years it took us all to get the Government to bring in satisfactory parity for the Welsh language. As a very young MP, I was entrusted by the Welsh parliamentary group to draw up a document—a review—so that we could persuade HMG of the need for parity. This was adopted word for word by Sir David Hughes Parry in his famous report.

I also want to congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hannan, on his excellent, wide-ranging maiden speech. He was obviously making it for the second time, having already made it in the European Parliament. Like many of us, I had to do this in both Houses. I am sure it will come as a big relief to him that it is over, and I am sure we all look forward to his future contributions.

I shall detain the House for only a few moments. I want to ask one question about the publicity for polling arrangements. Having successfully fought 11 elections in Wales, I hope the House will agree that I have a little knowledge of polling arrangements and polling booths. I will not embarrass myself, or the House, by reciting my majorities, save to say that I am grateful to my constituents for their support over the years.

My practice, invariably, was to go around all the polling booths. My wife and I would start in the morning, visit two stations before breakfast, then proceed up the valley, visiting each one in turn, and then go back down to the seaside for the evening. It was expected of me, and I enjoyed it. You went there to thank the polling officers and your own telling officers. If I had not gone, it would have been a huge mistake, and I am glad that, over 41 years, I took that step. I must say in passing that I hardly ever saw any of my opponents, who must have had better things to do, in their minds. However, that was my duty and that is how I carried it out. In 41 years, I never came across any trouble in a polling station. We should endeavour to ensure that there are no mistakes and no disturbances this time.

The point I want to make is that since there is a change in eligibility for Senedd elections—that is the Senedd's province—allowing those aged 16 and over

to vote but, on the other hand, there is no change in eligibility for the police and crime commissioners' elections on the same day—it remains at the normal voting age—I am concerned that there is no disturbance. What steps are the Government taking to publicise the difference in advance of the elections to avoid confusion and embarrassment? I ask this against the background of never having experienced a disturbance in a polling station; I just want to avoid young men and women experiencing embarrassment when they turn up and are told that they are entitled to vote in one election but not the other.

It is confusing. I realise how it has come about: one decision is down to the Welsh Government and the other is down to the Westminster Parliament. I hope that the Government will publicise this issue sufficiently to ensure that there is complete clarification on young people's rights well in advance so that they know they have only one vote. That will avoid any difficulty or embarrassment, particularly for polling officers.

2.31 pm

Lord Hayward (Con): My Lords, I follow other noble Lords in congratulating my noble friend Lord Hannan on an excellent maiden speech. I wish him well for all his future speeches, which will, I am sure, be as eloquent as his first.

In relation to the two orders before us, I am reminded that the first time I ever cast a vote was in Wales and bilingually: it was in favour of ending the ban on Sunday opening. I still recall the wording on the ballot paper in both English and Welsh but, given the facility of the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, and others in the language, I will not attempt to produce what I believe was the Welsh phraseology.

As my noble friend Lord True said, this change arises from my efforts—I thank my noble friend for his comments about them—and those of the noble Lord, Lord Rennard, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter. It is significant that a proposal that enhances democracy in these difficult circumstances came from this House, not the other place. In my mind, there is no question that it would not have been sensible to require people to pursue a series of nominations by knocking on doors all over the place to get the relevant signatures. I also pay tribute to the officials and Sheridan Westlake at No. 10 for trying to frame the change to the legislation so that we get the appropriate procedures.

I note, as my noble friend Lord True pointed out, that this order expires in February 2022. There are those who would wish to see it end at that point; I would favour the continuation of the process beyond that date because what was originally intended with the requirement of 10 signatures has now disappeared in the mists of time.

I want to spend a moment congratulating the Government. The guidance issued by them is extremely well phrased and well guided. The clarification on how many signatures are necessary, in which local authorities and under what circumstances is very clear indeed; I hope that other government documents follow the same process. My one slight observation in relation to government documents is that, as the noble Lord, Lord Hain, identified, the Government have issued

The Government's Approach to Elections and Referendums during COVID-19. There is no reference in it to the collection of nomination signatories; I wish that there had been.

Overall, I welcome the change and this statutory instrument. It has come about as a result of efforts from this House. I hope that, as a result of this and other changes in practice taking place between now and 6 May, the maximum number of people will feel able to participate in the elections, whether by post or in person.

2.35 pm

Lord Bhatia (Non-Afl) [V]: My Lords, the Explanatory Memorandum for the 2012 order was prepared by the Home Office. It states that that SI

“prescribes bilingual (English and Welsh) versions of ballot papers to be used in Wales at Police and Crime Commissioner elections on 15 November 2012.”

It also states that the 2011 Act

“provides for the establishment of a directly elected Police and Crime Commissioner for every police area in England and Wales outside London. This Order is being made in exercise of the powers contained in the 2011 Act and the Welsh Language Act 1993 ... This instrument applies to England and Wales ... The Home Secretary has made the following statement regarding Human Rights: In my view the provisions of the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2012 are compatible with the Convention rights ... In June 2010, the Government announced its intention to replace police authorities with directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales by 2012 ... English forms have already been prescribed in the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections Order 2012 ... under the same power in the 2011 Act but, as is usual practice, bilingual forms are being established separately by this Order ... This Order does not apply to businesses, charities or voluntary bodies ... The legislation does not apply to small business.”

I fully support the order.

2.37 pm

Lord Shipley (LD) [V]: My Lords, first, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hannan of Kingsclere, on his maiden speech. We very much look forward to his future contributions to the work of this House. I want to pick out one thing from his speech. He said that we need to give more meaning to the importance of casting a vote; I agree entirely with him on that.

I remind the House that I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I have nothing to add to the points made by earlier speakers this afternoon on the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Welsh Forms) Order. However, I do wish to address the order being debated alongside it—the Mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Coronavirus, Nomination of Candidates) (Amendment) Order—which is clearly sensible given the coronavirus pandemic and given similar decisions already made for other elections in May.

I want to put this order in context. When we discussed the West Yorkshire Combined Authority order in January, I referred to two matters, both of which remain highly relevant. One was the importance of scrutiny and the need to review how the new mayoral combined authorities have worked—that is, an assessment of how each is performing and what we can learn from their achievements or failures. When mayoral combined authorities were first introduced,

their bespoke nature was understandable because it meant that different areas could take on powers and responsibilities that suited their local circumstances. From the perspective of the Government, it meant that further approaches to spreading power in England could be tested. That approach has proved valuable, but we need to review how more power and responsibility might be devolved from Whitehall and Westminster, and not just to those existing combined authorities. That could take place in the context of the promise by the Government of a White Paper on English devolution, which was due last year.

The Minister may also recall that, at the last election, the Conservative Party manifesto contained a commitment to a constitution, democracy and rights commission. I understand the reasons why these have not happened yet, given the pandemic, but perhaps the Minister might tell us what the Government's plans are now.

The elections for police and crime commissioners, to which this order also applies, are the third set of elections since the introduction of the role and, as the Minister knows, there has been a consultation on police and crime commissioner powers recently. No doubt a number of proposals will arise from that in due course, but assessing the role of police and crime commissioners should not be done in isolation.

There are several issues of principle to consider. Should elected mayors have responsibility for policing or is that model too centralised? How should elected mayors and police and crime commissioners be held to account? London has an elected Assembly, but other parts of England do not. Is the police and crime commissioner model sufficiently resilient, and do police and crime panels succeed in holding police and crime commissioners to account? Do funding streams, divided between local government, mayors and police and crime commissioners, work as smoothly as they should? To what extent should governance of fire and rescue lie with police and crime commissioners?

There are many similar questions. In the past decade, we have seen a patchwork of new structures created. We have learned a lot from the many common approaches and the piloting of different approaches, but the time has come to try to review what has been achieved and what more should be done. This takes me back to the government plans for devolution in England and a constitutional commission. There would now be a benefit from the Government moving ahead with their White Paper on English devolution and saying more about their proposed commission.

2.42 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, I draw the attention of the House to my relevant interest on the register as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. As other noble Lords have, I warmly congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hannan of Kingsclere, on his excellent maiden speech. I wish him well in his time in this House. We will probably not agree on a number of issues, but I look forward to getting to know him and taking part in debates with him on important issues, as we both want to see our United Kingdom prosper in the years ahead. Even if you do not agree with other noble Lords, you can and should have respect for colleagues and the positions

[LORD KENNEDY OF SOUTHWARK]

they are taking and advancing, and seek to understand those positions. In my nearly 11 years in this House, I have enjoyed the ability to work across the House and parties, and with Cross-Bench and non-aligned Members, to come up with sensible solutions to the problems that the United Kingdom faces, which we need to address.

I was delighted to learn that the noble Lord is a Shakespearean scholar. I have a love of Shakespeare. When I was elected at Southwark Council, my first vote as a councillor was to get Shakespeare's Globe started and built in Bankside in Southwark, the borough in which I grew up and from which I take my title.

I am happy to give my full support to the two orders before us. First on the Welsh forms order, the noble Lord, Lord Thomas of Gresford, made valid points about the use of the Welsh language and ensuring that it develops and deepens in the community. The order adds to that aim, so I support it. We must always support all languages spoken in our islands. It is right, as the Explanatory Memorandum tells us, that the official forms for the police and crime commissioners are also provided in Welsh.

My noble friend Lord Hain made some valid points about the huge number of elections taking place on the same day across the United Kingdom. Like him, I would have preferred to see more consideration given to the use of all postal votes in some elections, as the Welsh Government suggested, but this has not been able to move forward and we are instead having elections as we are now, but it is important that we ensure that as many people as possible participate. The order seeks to ensure consistency with other elections held in Wales, which has its own discrete elections.

The noble Lord, Lord Lilley, highlighted that the turnout at PCC elections is still too low and I very much agree. The noble Lord, Lord Hannan of Kingsclere, made the point that the name may not be right. I too am not convinced that "police and crime commissioner" is correct. We had many debates on that in this House, but I am also not sure that "sheriff" is right either. Sheriffs have judicial office in Scotland and there are still ceremonial sheriffs appointed throughout England and Wales, the most famous being the sheriff of Nottingham, an official appointed by Nottingham City Council. The noble Lord, Lord True, knows all about that; it is an important civic office there.

The second order before us sensibly reduces the number of subscribing electors who are required to sign a candidate's nomination paper. Having acted as an election agent for the last 40 years, I am in favour of having as few names on the forms as practically possible. As the noble Lord, Lord Hayward, was saying, the proposal for signatures from 10 people is ideal. I support the order and hope, as he does, that we get to a more sensible number of electors rather than these large numbers.

It is important to recognise that the nomination process for these elections is safe, because it could put people at risk of exposure to and transmission of Covid-19, which we need to manage. Clearly the nomination process is part of that, so I fully endorse those points.

I also endorse the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Hayward, about how important it is for people to go out and cast their votes. Because we had no elections last year, we will have enormous numbers of elections of very important bodies and parliaments. We want to ensure that people get out there, cast their votes and give us their verdicts on our parties and how things have been run, and put people in charge of the different institutions for the years ahead. I support the call for people to go out and vote in the elections.

I also very much endorse the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, about combined and mayoral authorities, because there is some confusion there: some mayoral candidates have police powers and others do not. The Government should look at that and be clear. I remember a comment once from the noble Lord, Lord Tebbit, who is not in his place. He made the point that, living in Cambridgeshire, there were elections on everything—the parish council, the city council, the county council, the police and crime commissioner, the combined authority, and there is a new mayoral appointment there now. It was just a plethora of elections. We need to ensure that people understand who is in a position of power and how they relate to them. The Government should look at that carefully, but it is a matter for another day. I am happy to support both these orders and look forward to the Minister's response.

2.48 pm

Lord True (Con): My Lords, I thank all those who have spoken for the general welcome given to both these orders. I very much agree with the opening remarks of the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy of Southwark, about the way in which things are best done in this House and our ability to reach across the aisle. He has always exemplified that and I will always try to live up to that standard.

It would be hard, however, to live up to the standard of speaking of my noble friend Lord Hannan of Kingsclere, who we all welcomed to this House. I congratulate him on his impressive and thoughtful maiden speech. He touched on things that are important to all of us—at least, some are important to all of us, and some to some of us. As was said by another speaker, his affirmation of the importance of casting a vote—of getting people to use democracy, particularly local democracy—speaks volumes to someone who has spent a lot of their time working in local government; I think I speak for the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, on this as well. Without going into specifics, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, who also spoke eloquently about the importance of local democracy and devolution. I listened with interest to his remarks.

The noble Lord, Lord Hannan, spoke of a belief in freedom. As a child of the 1960s, I believe that almost every question comes back to freedom. I used to say that to my children when they were five years old and wanted to go out and play; they did not always see the point. It was good to hear him here today. Sometimes, in the pre-Brexit days, when some of us on these Benches were in a minority, we occasionally listened out for and watched his speeches in another place, which were an encouragement in difficult times. I wish him well in this House. He has instantly gained the respect of noble Lords on all sides.

I am grateful to all noble Lords who have contributed. I was asked a number of questions. The noble Lord, Lord Hain, ingeniously got Donald Trump into the question of police commissioner elections. I do not think that in any of this the Government were looking any further than the interests of democracy in this country and the Welsh language. The noble Lord asked whether Welsh Ministers were consulted and what the feedback from Welsh language advisers was. The answer is that the Welsh Language Advisory Group is content with the proposed changes. I believe the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, also raised this point. No major changes were made as a result of the consultation with stakeholders, who overall were content with the changes that we made.

I confirm that Cabinet Office officials sought the views of officials in the Welsh Government on the Welsh forms order. It is appropriate that there is consultation and effective activity on technical matters between the different Administrations in this country at official level. For that kind of contact to take place in no way denigrates the importance of intra-Administration contact.

The noble Lord, Lord Hain, also claimed that the Welsh Government were staggered, as he put it, that the UK Government were obstructing voting approaches. The conduct of elections in Wales is devolved. So far as the UK position is concerned, the Government in this time of Covid seek to ensure that people will have the opportunity to vote in the way that they wish to: by postal vote, by appointing a proxy or at a polling station. The UK Government do not think that changes to these mechanisms are needed. It would not have been possible to move to an all-postal vote without changing the voting process to remove the use of personal identifiers for security, which would open up the risk of fraud, or otherwise require them for every elector, which would run the risk that people would not provide them and so not be able to use a postal vote.

There will be three ways to vote in the UK: in person at a polling station, by postal vote or by proxy and these will all be available in 2021. We recognise that the pandemic may change people's needs and preferences as to how they cast their vote. Guidance is available to enable voters to make their choice. The UK Government have always been clear that it would not be appropriate to impose an all-postal vote for the elections, as this increases fraud risk and removes choice from voters who wish to cast their vote in person.

We are seeking to put in place a strong set of new measures to ensure that the polls are Covid-secure. As for why campaigning is allowed when people still cannot see loved ones, this is highly regrettable but these are the circumstances that Covid requires. I look forward with passion to the day when I can see my granddaughter again. But campaigning is an essential part of democracy. Voters deserve to be well informed before going to the polls and there must be a level playing field for candidates. Careful guidance has been issued.

On the collection of nominations, the view is that people should follow social distancing rules, so no specific guidance has been given on that. All persons involved in the electoral process must ensure that public health is protected. The Government have issued appropriate guidance to that purpose and will continue to do so.

In response to the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, as I said, the Welsh Language Advisory Group was content with the proposed changes and translations and no major changes were made as a result. We have worked closely with our partners, including the Welsh Government, to support the delivery of Covid-secure polls in May 2021. I repeat, it is for the Welsh Government to take decisions around polls within their competence. We will continue to work with them to ensure an aligned approach to the polls.

The noble and learned Lord, Lord Morris of Aberavon, raised a particular and important issue and I undertake to write to him with guidance on how the circumstances that he described would be addressed.

There has not been major dissent and I am grateful for your Lordships' support for the instruments today. I think most agree that they make sensible changes to support the effective administration of elections, reducing the number of signatures that candidates will need to be nominated, which balances the need to demonstrate local support for those wishing to stand as a candidate. I hear what some noble Lords said about the number of signatures. As I set out in my opening remarks, the previous position will come back in May 2022. I always found it rather congenial going around to get nomination signatures, because they occasionally came with a cup of coffee or even a glass of wine. I am sure we will listen to your Lordships' advice on this matter.

To conclude, I very much welcome what has been said about the Welsh language. This order carries on a long process of work that goes way back. I remember working as a young adviser with Viscount Whitelaw in the days when the battle over Welsh language broadcasting was live. The work is never completed, but we are ensuring here that there is effective Welsh language provision at elections in Wales and consistency with other elections held in Wales. In a world that treks towards a drab uniformity of approved culture and thought, we should always cherish the richness of ancient cultures and language, among which the great Welsh language is pre-eminent. In that spirit, I commend the instruments to the House.

Motion agreed.

**Mayoral and Police and Crime
Commissioner Elections (Coronavirus,
Nomination of Candidates) (Amendment)
Order 2021**

Motion to Approve

2.58 pm

Moved by Lord True

That the draft Order laid before the House on 8 February be approved.

Relevant documents: 46th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee and 41st Report from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments (special attention drawn to the instrument).

Motion agreed.

2.59 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

3.15 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Lord McNicol of West Kilbride) (Lab): My Lords, the time limit for the following debate is one hour.

Northamptonshire (Structural Changes) (Supplementary Provision and Amendment) Order 2021

Motion to Approve

3.15 pm

Moved by Lord Greenhalgh

That the draft Order laid before the House on 25 January be approved.

The Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Lord Greenhalgh) (Con): My Lords, if approved and made, this order will make provision in relation to the two new unitary councils in Northamptonshire, which will be fully up and running from 1 April 2021, taking on all local government functions from that date. The order will ensure that there is a smooth transition from the predecessor to successor councils.

Following approval from Parliament, we legislated in February 2020 to abolish the existing Northamptonshire County Council and the seven district councils in the area and establish the new unitary councils of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire. These local government changes were locally led, having been proposed by councils in Northamptonshire. We were satisfied that, if implemented, their proposal would be likely to improve local government and service delivery in the area; that they would have a good deal of local support; and that the new councils would have a credible geography.

I must pay tribute to all the local leaders and their officers who have worked so hard to implement both this restructuring in Northamptonshire and the successful launch of the new councils, all while responding to the Covid pandemic. I also offer my thanks to our commissioners there, who have done so much to stabilise the position of the existing county council and provide a stable base for the transition to the new authorities.

The order we are considering makes the following changes in relation to the new councils. First, it makes amendments to the Lieutenancies Act 1997 and the Sheriffs Act 1887 to insert in the relevant schedules references to the new local government areas of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire in relation to the positions of Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff respectively. This will ensure the continuation of these important roles, which represent the Crown in Northamptonshire. There is no change to the boundary of the ceremonial county of Northamptonshire, and there is no change to the functions or jurisdiction of the Lord Lieutenant or High Sheriff of Northamptonshire.

Secondly, the order makes provision to ensure that the property, rights, assets and liabilities of the Northamptonshire pension fund transfer from Northamptonshire County Council to West Northamptonshire Council, which will be the new administering authority of the pension fund. This will ensure the continuation of the administration of the pension fund and avoid the crystallisation of any pension liability.

It further provides that the responsibility for assets and liabilities in the pension fund relating to the pensions of employees or former employees of the councils that are to be abolished transfers to successor councils in proportions determined by West Northamptonshire Council. This will ensure that there is clarity on who is taking over the responsibility for funding existing pensions accrued and preventing exit payments arising. In coming to a fair determination on these matters, the order provides that West Northamptonshire Council must take advice from an actuary and consult North Northamptonshire Council.

The order before noble Lords addresses two supplementary and incidental issues that could not be addressed in the existing regulations on generic application, which enable effective implementation of all unitary authorities. These specific provisions need to be applied directly with respect to these particular authorities. I assure noble Lords that we have worked closely on this order with the existing councils and shadow authorities for North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire, looking carefully at a number of issues raised and agreeing that the provisions of the order meet local requirements.

In conclusion, these provisions are necessary consequential changes in the light of the establishment of the new councils that Parliament has approved. They ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements and continued effective local government in the areas. I commend this order to the House.

3.20 pm

Lord Naseby (Con) [V]: My Lords, I support the Minister and thank him so much for bringing this order forward. My first involvement in local government goes way back to 1968, when I had the privilege of leading the team that won Islington Borough Council, in effect winning every seat. Admittedly, Harold Wilson was rather unpopular at the time—another turnaround situation.

My first involvement with Northampton itself started 1972, when new boundaries had been agreed and Northampton South and Northampton North were looking for candidates. I put my name in and was told that Northampton South was a long shot, but I was not put off and, while I was on holiday in the south of France in the July, I got a telephone call asking if I would come back for an interview. Obviously, I did, and I was selected and flew back to what turned out to be a brilliant holiday.

The election was in February 1974. Mine was a marginal seat: my majority was 179. On the first count, it was minus 200-odd. On the second count, it was near enough level, and on the third count, I got 179—a good win. In October 1974, there was another election with a swing against my party, and I succeeded

by 141; there was no personal swing against me, and the success was primarily due to tracking those who had moved from my best ward. As such, I say a huge public thank you again to the electors of Northampton South, who stuck with me through thick and thin until the disaster of 1997.

I turn to Northampton itself and the county. Northampton is a fourth-generation new town—it made a huge success of that, and I say to my noble friend on the Front Bench that we should do something similar today, though maybe on a smaller scale. I am still involved today: as president of Northamptonshire County Cricket Club, the Steelbacks, and at the University of Northampton—which is doing so well—the Saints, the rugby team, and Silverstone racing track. That involvement is still there. I pay tribute to the leadership of those days: George Pollard, John Lowther, Bill Morton, Jack Corrin, Ann Addison, Anne Goodman and the aldermanic bench. There was good liaison in those days with the MPs; indeed, I remember marching along the Embankment in the early days, seeking proper funding for Northamptonshire in toto.

Turning to the specifics, there is little purpose going over what went wrong. Frankly, it is exceedingly embarrassing to see my county in such a difficult situation. To the outsider, it seems to have been a combination of poor leadership, not putting the council tax up to a realistic level, installing a corporate structure that was not suited and, I am afraid, the top councillors clearly not keeping their eye on the ball.

I must now, quite rightly, focus on the future. It is a wonderful, dynamic part of England—right in the middle, with wonderful connections. I wondered about the break-up of the unitaries, because I live in Bedfordshire, which has three—two big towns and the middle bit where I live—but having looked at the details of Northamptonshire, which has five significant towns and a middle bit straddling quite a long way, I think the proposal for west Northamptonshire and north Northamptonshire strikes the correct balance.

The split is there. It seems appropriate, although it is sad that the eight district councils have had to be wound up. That is pretty dramatic; I thank all the councillors on them who have given up so much time. After all the trials and tribulations, it was disappointing that we did not have some elections in 2020 to get going again, but now they are to go ahead in a few months' time.

I have studied the order in some depth, as my noble friend on the Front Bench will understand. I see at paragraph 7.3 of the Explanatory Memorandum, as he has referred to, that there are amendments to the Lieutenancies Act 1997 and the Sheriffs Act 1887. I thank my noble friend for ensuring that, in other words, there is to be no change to the boundary of the ceremonial county of Northamptonshire or to the functions of the Lord-Lieutenant or the High Sheriff of Northamptonshire. I admire both present incumbents and many other previous ones.

I looked at the pension fund in some depth—I declare an interest as a trustee of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund—and seek reassurance that this will be closely and properly audited before it is formally handed over. I am sure there is nothing

wrong there; nevertheless, given that the county council's financial situation got into such a mess, I and, I am sure, the people of Northamptonshire wish to be reassured that what is being handed over is in proper order and that the pension fund is solvent to deal with and look after our pensions.

I formally pay my thanks to the senior inspector, Max Caller CBE, for the careful work he did on analysing the situation, recognising that there was no way of carrying on as a county council and that we had to move forward.

I will now look at the future in a little more depth. It is a proud county, and there will still be many organisations county-wide. I have mentioned Northamptonshire County Cricket Club, in which I declare an interest as president, a really well-run club that is succeeding well. Equally well run are the Saints; both have good structures, with strong chairmen and active boards. We have a university that came out of a further education college and a teacher training college, today ranking close to the top of the second division of universities. I pay great tribute to the vice-chancellor and his team for what they have done there. There will also be other county things such as the arts world and music, so we can all hold our heads up proudly that the geographical dimension of Northamptonshire is still very much there.

I cannot resist a brief word about the Battle of Naseby, on 14 June 1645, where Fairfax and Cromwell defeated the King and, in effect, led our country to meaningful parliamentary government—hence why I took the name, with the blessing, I emphasise, of Naseby Parish Council. I am still deeply involved in many parts of the county. Mentioning the battle again, there is a wonderful trail with viewing platforms for those who are interested.

Every unitary council today, after Covid, faces a huge challenge, none more so than the two newer ones. Northamptonshire people and businesses have dynamism and respected companies, with names that are well-known worldwide: Church's shoes, British Timken, Barclaycard, Silverstone itself—with wonderful companies such as Cosworth and all the others—to mention a few.

But there is an immediate challenge for the two new councils: the new wave of cash grants for hospitality and high street firms. Those councils will be in charge of the distribution and I know that others elsewhere have not been too good at that. I look to the two new unitary authorities to be in the vanguard, so that when the distribution has been done, my noble friend the Minister will be able to stand up and say, "They've done a good job." I look to the two new Northamptonshire unitaries to be in that vanguard and I say to them publicly that I am available to help in any way possible, as I imagine all the Members of Parliament for the county are too.

3.30 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab) [V]: My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Naseby, with his charming recollections of Northamptonshire and his evident commitment to the area that he represented for 24 years in Parliament and has continued to care about since he joined this House. That was a most impressive speech.

[LORD LIDDLE]

My interest in this subject, which I declare, is as a member of Cumbria County Council. I shall not comment on specific Northamptonshire issues, but I would like to engage the Government, if they are willing, in a debate about the general principles of their approach to local government reorganisation.

This May it will be half a century since I was first elected as a local councillor, in the then Oxford County Borough, which became Oxford District Council. For four years I was a member of Lambeth Council in the 1980s, where I led the SDP opposition to Ted Knight—someone who was as far away from the founding principles of the Labour Party as could possibly be imagined. For the last eight years I have been a Labour councillor in Cumbria.

My earliest political experience was living through local government reorganisation, when the county borough in Oxford became a district. Now I am living through it again, because on 22 February the Government formally announced that they were consulting on proposals to reorganise local government in Cumbria. I know that the Minister will not be able to comment on that in detail, but I would like to make some general points, which I hope he may be able to respond to in a letter.

I am a strong supporter of the unitary model. As I said, I was first elected to a county borough, but the problem with a county borough is that it did not reach beyond its hinterland. I believe that unitaries are the best model. The public do not understand two-tier local government: they talk about “the council” and do not know which council they are talking to. Two tiers also create artificial barriers to efficiency. It is nonsense to have local planning and housing issues decided at one level and highways and traffic at another. It is nonsense to separate housing from social services, where a lot of the preventive efforts relate to the housing service.

In the Covid emergency we have seen a split between public health, which is a county responsibility, and environmental health, which is a district responsibility. None of that makes sense and it involves a lot of duplication. In Cumbria we have far too many councillors—possibly including me. We have 350 of them. When we know—as we do from the Budget yesterday—that there will be no cornucopia of provision for local government in the next few years, it is important to make efficiency savings where we can.

People on the other side of the argument say that big unitary authorities mean a lack of democratic accountability. The answer to that, in my view, is to strengthen town and parish councils at the very local level. In the town I represent, Wigton, there is a very active town council and I would like to see its role extended. That would give very local accountability for very local decisions.

Moving to unitary authorities has my general support. The Government have so far adopted a mixed approach. In some places, such as Cornwall and Buckinghamshire, they have created a single unitary for the county. Why did they not adopt that approach in Northamptonshire? This clearly cannot be simply a question of geography and population size, because Cornwall and Buckinghamshire are very big areas.

There is also an issue about whether government policy and plans for local government reorganisation allow county boundaries to be crossed. Has that happened so far? In Cumbria there is now a proposal to create a Morecambe Bay authority—but the only snag with that is that it would deprive Lancashire County Council of its county town. What is the Government’s view in principle of proposals that cross county boundaries? For instance, in the case of Northampton, was the idea of creating an urban-based authority consisting of Northampton, Bedford and Milton Keynes ever considered? That would be logical if we were prepared to cross old county boundaries. What is the Government’s attitude to that?

In Northamptonshire the reorganisation has clearly involved breaking up services that were provided on a county basis. We know that that has been avoided for the lord lieutenancy and the pension scheme, but what has been the experience with children’s services? Has the trust model worked? Do the Government think that a children’s services trust can be held accountable when things go wrong? What are the lessons that they have drawn?

What reorganisation should definitely not be based on is political pressure from Members of Parliament who basically just want to hang on to existing structures. A lot of that is because they see district councillors as their grass-roots organisation. I do not think that should be regarded as a principle to prevent sensible reorganisation.

What criteria will the Government use in looking at all these different proposals for reorganisation? In Cumbria we have four proposals—one for a single unitary, which I support, and three different versions with two unitaries. That is a confusing situation and some order must be given to its consideration.

These are difficult questions and I am not expecting a clear answer from the Minister. I apologise for taking up the time of the House on these issues, but the Government have been rather slow and rather reluctant to show a bit of leg—if I might put it that way—in the reasoning behind local government reorganisation, which in principle I support. I believe in local government, as I know the Minister does. I have a passion for it, and I want to see a reorganisation carried out on a sensible basis, which can last for generations.

3.38 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, I draw the attention of the House to my relevant registered interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I am happy to support the order before the House. As we have heard, it makes a number of changes and provides for the smooth transition to the new unitary councils that are to replace the old two-tier system in Northamptonshire. It also confirms that, for ceremonial purposes, the county of Northamptonshire remains in place; it is just the governance arrangements that will be different.

I thank all the councillors from all parties and no party, and all the staff, from all the local authorities, who have worked hard for the benefit of residents in Northamptonshire. I join the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Greenhalgh, in his tribute. In particular, I pay tribute to, and thank, Councillor Tom Beattie for his leadership of Corby Borough Council over many years.

I lived and worked in the East Midlands for a long time. It is a wonderful place. Northamptonshire is a wonderful county, which the noble Lord, Lord Naseby, served with distinction for many years as one of its MPs. I agree with the noble Lord about what a wonderful, dynamic place Northamptonshire is. There is beautiful countryside, great businesses, such as Dr Martens in Wellingborough, Weetabix in Burton Latimer and Carlsberg in Northampton, world-class rugby with Northampton Saints, motor racing at Silverstone and Corby's steel heritage and connections with Scotland. One of my dear friends was Mr Bob Wood, a leading figure in the Corby and East Northamptonshire Labour Party. Bob often told me of travelling down from Aberdeen with his family to get a job in the steel works. He remained at the steel works until they closed in 1979. That historic connection between Scotland and Corby is still there today. I remember taking Donald Dewar to Corby many times. He would have a lovely time there because he met people and families he knew from Glasgow because they had moved down to Corby.

At the risk of being accused of being party-political again, I think it is worth putting on record that this reorganisation has come about not through the coming together of local authorities, nor through the realisation by local authorities that unitarisation is the best way forward—though I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, that it is—but through the financial mismanagement and near collapse of Northamptonshire County Council. We discussed those matters before the noble Lord, Lord Greenhalgh, was a Minister and before he was in the House. I have great respect for the noble Lord, but I think I need to run through some of those episodes.

Here is one illustration of the shambles we have had in Northamptonshire. On 12 October 2017, the £53 million, bright, shiny, brand new county HQ, One Angel Square, was opened by the right honourable Member for Bromsgrove, Mr Sajid Javid, who was the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The Secretary of State told the assembled guests that it was a wonderful building, the headquarters of a bright, modern, forward-facing county council. The video of that opening is still online; I watched it again last night, and the Secretary of State praises the council and the work it does. I must say that I always liked the old county council building; I do not think there was anything wrong with that at all.

Jump forward six months to 27 March 2018, and Mr Sajid Javid stands up in the House of Commons and announces that he is minded to send in commissioners to run the county council, following the publication of *Northampton County Council Best Value Inspection* which said that the council had

“failed to comply with its duty ... to provide best value in the delivery of its services”

and should be scrapped, and that commissioners should take control of the authority's finances and governance from day one. On 10 May 2018, the new the Secretary of State, Mr James Brokenshire, announces they have decided to send in commissioners to run the county council.

It is not good. It is financial mismanagement at its worst. It is letting down those you are elected to serve. It is letting down those least able to defend themselves.

It is not good enough. Taken with the serious failures of governance at Northampton Borough Council, resulting in the loss of £10 million of taxpayers' money in the Northampton Town loan scandal, it is a complete and utter disgrace. Now, to be clear, where Labour councils or councillors have failed to uphold high standards, I expect action to be taken by my party. I believe nobody should stand for election to North Northamptonshire Council or West Northamptonshire Council if they have played a leading role in any of these scandals. The Government should think about that carefully because we have let residents and the council taxpayers down.

It was important to put that on the record. Having said that, I support the order. I wish the new councils and councillors well, but there have been serious problems they have to deal with. Something has gone seriously wrong in this county over many years.

3.44 pm

Lord Greenhalgh (Con): My Lords, we have had an interesting and brief debate this afternoon. I am grateful for the insightful and helpful contributions noble Lords have made. I would like to provide some further detail on some of the points that have been raised.

My noble friend Lord Naseby was clear about his considerable local government pedigree and distinguished parliamentary career representing Northampton South. He clearly has that close bond with the historic county of Northamptonshire, and I recognise his support for the proposed split into two unitaries. I give my noble friend assurance that there is an annual audit of the pension fund and that there has been a clear apportionment of the pension assets and liabilities to ensure it happens fairly and that the pension fund can continue to operate unaffected.

The noble Lord, Lord Liddle, was very passionate about the advantages of unitarisation, and I would point out that the devolution proposals are locally-led. The split followed the recommendation of an independent review of Northamptonshire County Council by Max Caller. It was supported by local leaders, and a significant consultation exercise was carried out. I can also assure the noble Lord that the Secretary of State will clearly evaluate the criteria for unitarisation and the results of the consultation against those criteria before making any decision. He will have regard for all the information that has been provided to him.

I point out to the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, that it is important that we root out those few councils that let people down. It is the residents of the area that suffer. I am sure he would agree there are examples of Labour councils that have run up huge levels of debt. The most obvious is Croydon Council, which ran up a debt of £1.5 billion and did not have the reserves to be able to continue financing even basic services. So we need to make sure there is a framework in place and that local leaders who have taken those poor decisions do not have a future in the leadership of local government. I agree with him on that.

In conclusion, this order makes a significant contribution to support and empower local government to deliver public services to the people of Northamptonshire in an efficient and effective way. This order completes the

[LORD GREENHALGH]
legislative requirements necessary to implement a locally-led proposal for unitarisation in Northamptonshire. It ensures that necessary technical arrangements around ceremonial matters and local government pension scheme arrangements are in place so that there continues to be effective local government in Northamptonshire.

The new local authorities undergoing reorganisation are making excellent progress towards their go-live date, and I am confident the new councils, West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council, will be successfully launched on 1 April 2021, bringing about the improved local government and service delivery that the people of Northamptonshire need and deserve. I commend this order to the House.

Motion agreed.

The Deputy Speaker (Lord McNicol of West Kilbride) (Lab): We are just going to swap the speakers, and we are waiting for the Minister, so, rather than adjourn the House, we are going to take one minute, then move straight on.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): My Lords, I think it would be sensible if we adjourned for two minutes.

3.49 pm

Sitting suspended.

Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill *Commons Reason and Amendments*

3.51 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Faulkner of Worcester) (Lab): My Lords, I will call Members to speak in the order listed. As there are no counterpropositions, Members not listed may not speak and the Minister's Motions may not be opposed. Short questions of elucidation after the Minister's response are discouraged. A Member listed to speak and wishing to ask such a question must email the clerk.

Motion A

Moved by Baroness Barran

That this House do not insist on its Amendment 1 and do agree with the Commons in their Amendments 1A and 1B in lieu.

1A: The Schedule, page 8, line 4, at end insert—

“1A In section 134 (restrictions in leases and licences), in subsection (8), for the definition of “lease” substitute—
““lease”—

(a) in relation to England and Wales and Northern Ireland, includes—

(i) any head lease, sub-lease or underlease,

(ii) any tenancy (including a sub-tenancy), and

(iii) any agreement to grant any such lease or tenancy;

(b) in relation to Scotland, includes any sub-lease and any agreement to grant a sub-lease,

And “lessor” and “lessee” are to be construed accordingly;”.

1B: Page 9, line 21, leave out “, after the definition of “lease” insert—” and insert “—

(a) for the definition of “lease” substitute—

““lease”—

(a) in relation to England and Wales and Northern Ireland, includes—

(i) any head lease, sub-lease or underlease,

(ii) any tenancy (including a sub-tenancy), and

(iii) any agreement to grant any such lease or tenancy,

but does not include a mortgage by demise or sub-demise;

(b) in relation to Scotland, includes any sub-lease and any agreement to grant a sub-lease,

and “leased premises” and “lessee” are to be read accordingly;”;

(b) before the definition of “relevant person” insert—”

Motion B

Moved by Baroness Barran

That this House do not insist on its Amendment 3 to which the Commons have disagreed for their Reason 3A.

3A: Because the Commons do not consider it necessary for the Secretary of State to be required to carry out a review as set out in Lords Amendment No. 3.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Barran) (Con): My Lords, I am moving Motions A and B en bloc. When the Bill was introduced in early 2020, we could not have predicted the situation that we find ourselves in now. Over the past year, our telecoms network has allowed businesses to continue to operate, children to continue to learn and those in isolation to continue to see and speak to families and friends. As the Minister for Digital Infrastructure has done in the other place, I give wholehearted thanks to the UK's digital infrastructure providers, internet service providers and mobile network operators. They have stepped up and worked with us to bridge the gaps in provision, be that through whitelisting educational websites, providing free data and devices to struggling families or coming together to deliver connectivity to the Nightingale hospitals and vaccination sites. As with any industry, there is a tendency to pay attention only when something goes wrong and to ignore the huge amount of effort and hard work it takes to keep things working normally. The industry's efforts during this extraordinary time cannot and must not be forgotten.

However, the coronavirus pandemic has put into sharp relief the divide between the digital haves and the digital have-nots. This Government's ambition is to support the delivery of fast, reliable, resilient broadband to every home and business in this country. Noble Lords will be aware—not least from our discussions during the passage of the Bill—of the myriad, complex barriers that face infrastructure deployment. There is no panacea, but the Bill provides a modest yet vital development. Despite having once been described by the *Guardian* as “an obscure technical bill”, it has within its initial scope some 10 million people in the UK who live in flats and apartments. It also contains the flexibility to bring still more people into its scope in the future, such as those in office blocks and business parks, where the evidence points to it.

We expect these provisions, once commenced, to make a real difference to rollout, along with other measures we are taking forward such as mandating gigabit connectivity to new-build developments and reforms to the street-works regime so that it better supports deployment.

I trust that your Lordships will have seen that a consultation on further potential changes to the Electronic Communications Code has now been published. We will carefully consider whether further legislative changes beyond those made in the Digital Economy Act 2017 are necessary as a result of what we learn from that consultation. These are all steps that, combined, will help operators achieve their, and this Government's, ambitious connectivity targets. Crucially, these measures will take into account the interests of those needing greater connectivity, balancing those interests alongside those of landowners. Just as with the Bill, that balance is crucial to ensure that we continue to bridge that digital divide.

The Motion asks that this House does not insist on its Amendment 1 and does agree with the Commons in its Amendments 1A and 1B in lieu. As noble Lords will recall, Amendment 1 was tabled by the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, following similar amendments by the Opposition Front Bench, here and in the other place. Its purpose is to clarify that people who rent their flat can make use of the policy in the Bill. While we maintain that the Bill has always provided for that, the strength of feeling on the matter is undeniable. To make it clear that the Bill serves the interests of tenants as well as leaseholders, the Government have tabled two amendments in the spirit of that tabled by the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones. The amendments clarify the definition of "lease" in the Electronic Communications Code, to ensure that it includes, for example, any tenancy. I hope that your Lordships will support these amendments.

I hope that the House will not insist on Lords Amendment 3, to which the Commons has disagreed for Reason 3A. That amendment, tabled by the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson of Balmacara, adds a new clause requiring the Secretary of State to commission a review of the impact of the Bill on the Electronic Communications Code. The proposed new clause requires the commissioned review to include an assessment of whether the code is sufficient to support the delivery of one gigabit per second broadband to every premise in the country by 2025. The amendment also requires that further, separate assessments be made of whether the code should be amended to

"introduce rights of access to telecommunications operators akin to those available to suppliers of electricity, gas, and water".

The amendment also provides for an assessment as to whether the code should be amended to provide additional development rights and encourage collaboration alongside other works being carried out in the locality.

I recognise and appreciate the intention with which this amendment was tabled. It is important that the Government are held to account over their rollout targets, and it is frustrating that many parts of the country still do not have access to the digital services they need. However, we continue to believe that the amendment is unnecessary and seeks to introduce

provisions which fall outside the purpose of the Bill and, indeed, the code itself. As I have said, there are already mechanisms in place by which the department's rollout targets are measured and scrutinised.

Ofcom, the independent regulator, publishes its annual *Connected Nations* report, which it updates a further two times a year. This provides a clear assessment of the progress that this country is making in providing connectivity, both fixed and mobile. These reports provide detailed analysis of the connectivity available in the UK as a whole, in each of the nations and in urban and rural areas. They show the progress that is being made in the deployment of gigabit-capable networks and 4G and 5G coverage. They show progress in relation to connections to superfast services, as well as the areas in this country which are not yet served—for example, those premises unable to access a broadband speed that meets the minimum under the universal service obligation. Should the Ofcom reports raise questions, the Government continue to provide answers and clarity on any aspects of their work in this area, both in this House and in the other place.

4 pm

Furthermore, there are established means of scrutiny through Select Committees. To take some recent examples, in December 2020 the DCMS Select Committee published its report, *Broadband and the road to 5G*; in January this year, the Public Accounts Committee published its report, *Improving Broadband*; and in February, the Science and Technology Committee published *UK telecommunications infrastructure and the UK's domestic capability*. Ministers and senior officials have given evidence to Parliament on a number of occasions and have been asked to account for their progress towards achieving greater connectivity as part of these sessions.

Moving on to the more technical reasons why we cannot accept this amendment, I remind your Lordships that the Electronic Communications Code is technology neutral. It is not about what is being installed; rather, it is about where, when and how equipment is installed. It is about the rights of operators to perform these activities and the rights of those whose land is used for this purpose. It is simply not possible to judge whether the Electronic Communications Code supports access to 1 gigabit per second broadband, because it is not designed to facilitate just gigabit-capable connections.

By contrast, the code is about access to land to facilitate the installation, maintenance and upgrade of electronic communications networks, including gigabit-capable broadband but also mobile telephony. The only way to judge the code is to examine the availability of all types of connections. As I have mentioned just now, the independent regulator does exactly that and regularly publishes those reports.

With regard to comparing the powers of telecom operators with gas, water and electricity suppliers, the Government recognise that further changes to the code may be required if it is to effectively support the achievement of our coverage and connectivity targets. Shortly before Third Reading, we published a consultation on further potential changes to the code. That consultation seeks responses from interested parties on a number of different issues relating to access to land. These issues

[BARONESS BARRAN]

have been raised by us with stakeholders and go beyond the specific matter of unresponsive landlords that the Bill addresses. The consultation is open until 24 March 2021. The Government will look closely at all responses in evaluating whether further changes are needed and, if so, what those changes should be.

The amendment in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, goes further still and references permitted development rights and street works. DCMS does not have responsibility for these two policy areas, but I reassure your Lordships that DCMS officials work in close contact with the relevant parts of government to take a joined-up approach and to pursue the reforms that the industry is asking for.

Additional development rights are a planning matter which sits outside the Electronic Communications Code. However, many noble Lords will be aware that telecom operators are afforded significantly more flexibility in how they install their infrastructure. This includes, for example—under permitted development rights—exemptions from a number of requirements to request planning permission. My department continues to work closely with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in that regard, and in August 2019 we launched a joint consultation with MHCLG regarding potential reform of permitted development rights, particularly to support mobile network deployment. The Government published their response to that consultation in July 2020. The response announced that, subject to a technical consultation, we will take forward the proposed reforms. We expect to publish the technical consultation in the spring.

Finally, I reassure your Lordships of the work that the Government are already doing with regard to the co-ordination of street works and promoting greater collaboration between telecom providers with local authorities and the suppliers of gas, water and electricity. My department is working closely with the Department for Transport and last year released the new Street Manager digital service. This was the largest update to street works in a generation and has simplified and improved the planning and co-ordination of works throughout England. This service is used by utilities and highway authorities alike and is offering unprecedented opportunity for collaboration and joint works. The Government are continuing to assess what further reforms can be made to improve co-ordination and collaboration, including changes to both permitting and traffic management schemes. I also note that roads are an area of devolved competence, so they would not be an appropriate addition to this Bill, which applies throughout the UK.

I hope that the Government's reasons for disagreeing with Amendment 3 are clear. We fully appreciate the intentions of this amendment, and the Government share your Lordships' concerns that telecom operators must be given the best tools possible if they are to deliver world-class connectivity.

We are listening to the telecom industry very carefully, and I assure noble Lords that we are getting there and identifying and delivering the necessary reforms. However, this amendment is impractical. It aims to bring into the Bill issues that it has never been the role of the

Electronic Communications Code to provide, such as gigabit-capable connections and improved planning and street works.

I hope that your Lordships will be reassured by the recent publication of the consultation considering potential reforms to the Electronic Communications Code. We remain very much open to ideas from the industry and landowners on how the Government can better support rollout, and we will take legislative action if the evidence demonstrates a need to do so. I therefore beg to move that this House disagrees with Amendment 3.

Lord Fox (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her thorough review of both the amendments, and of the scene.

The Bill seems to have been around almost as long as the Covid pandemic. I am almost minded to call it the “lockdown Bill”, because it surfaced from time to time and then disappeared from time to time. Looking forward, I hope that future Bills which may or may not emerge from consultations will perhaps have a rather more impelling momentum than this one, which seems to have been rather caught in the backwash of legislation.

It has been a Bill of essentially two debates. One was the huge concern that your Lordships demonstrated about the nature of the digital communications supply chain; the Minister may be pleased to know that I will not go back into that. The other debate—the Minister may not agree—has exposed the paucity of ambition in the Bill and, therefore, by extension, in Her Majesty's Government. On the Minister's own admission, it is a narrow Bill; I would say it is just about as narrow as the Government's USO, which I remind your Lordships is just 10 megabits a second. Both the Government and the industry should be seeking to increase that.

When it comes to the digital communications supply chain, there is one thing that I should like to talk about. Much work is to be done in the sector as it comes to terms with the future absence of Huawei. Since we last considered the Bill, some of us have received letters from the Minister setting out plans for supply chain diversity. I hope that that letter is in the Library; if not, it would be appreciated if the Minister made sure that it was. Government support for the NEC open RAN trial is good and we welcome that. I remind the Minister that the Government's stated aim is to have 5G open RAN up and running this year. It would therefore be helpful if the Minister were able in her closing words to let us know whether that is on track. I should point out in referring to the technical consultation being due in the spring that the first day of spring was Monday, so we are, as it were, already sprung.

I turn to the items on the Marshalled List. When addressing the amendment on leasehold status in the Commons, the Minister of State Matt Warman MP recognised the plight of people living in flats and apartments, which was welcome. He and the Minister enumerated about 10 million people as potentially benefiting from being able to seek better broadband in their homes. That point was thoroughly made by my noble friend Lord Clement-Jones. The purpose of his amendment on Report was to clarify, as the Minister said, that people who rent their flat can make use of the changes in the Bill. It is gratifying that the Government

have retained the spirit of that Amendment 1 in offering Amendments 1A and 1B instead. I am sure that my noble friend will have more to say on that.

Turning to Lords Amendment 3, the Government's response is not supportive and that is disappointing. That amendment would have added a new clause requiring the Secretary of State to commission a review of the impact of the Bill on the Electronic Communications Code. It seems to me that in her rebuttal of that amendment the Minister enumerated the considerable weaknesses of the code and set out some areas of concern. Amendment 3 would have included an assessment of whether the code was sufficient to support 1 gigabit broadband rollout in every premises by 2025. In her rebuttal, she said that the code was not competent to do that. Given that so much weight has been put, not least by the Government, on that target, that would seem to be a serious issue. As the Minister set out, it would have required separate assessments to be made, as well as addressing the issue around utilities—that was well rehearsed on Report and I do not propose to do so again.

However, I am tempted to ask what the Government are scared of in terms of allowing that review to happen. They seem to be nervous about their ability to deliver on that 1 gigabit target. It was therefore not surprising that Matt Warman MP would politely denounce that amendment, as the Minister has done today. Both focused on the assertion that elements of the amendment fall outside the scope of the Bill. It is not beyond understanding that if that were the case the Government could have come back with an amendment that retained or created a review but also satisfied the need for the amendment to sit inside the Bill. Once again, we have fallen foul of the narrowness of the Bill.

It is partly surprising and perhaps gratifying that the Government have realised how narrow the Bill is, and it was almost remarkable that before the ink was dry on it, the next consultation came fluttering through the letterbox. Perhaps the Minister has, in a sense, already confirmed the recognition that the Bill was insufficient in the first place. It has taken us a long time for us to get not very far and now we have to start again.

On many occasions, the Minister has reminded us that the code is technology-neutral. I think we know and understand that. Therefore, the review has to grasp that within the context of how the code in future deals with the key issue: are people getting the connectivity they need, can we measure it, and can we make it quicker and better as well as cheaper? I hope that that goes beyond simply talking about access to land and that kind of issue. Let us get through this consultation as quickly and thoroughly as we can. Let us get another Bill so that we can create a code that does what it needs to do and is fit for purpose because, let us face it, the Government have an interest in delivering the gigabit target from their manifesto but the country has much higher stakes in this. We need it as soon as possible.

4.15 pm

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (CB): My Lords, I join the Minister in congratulating our telecoms providers on rising to the challenge of providing relatively comprehensive connectivity to the nation in response to Covid.

However, I am reluctant to speak to Amendment 3 in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson of Balmacara, other than to say that I do not support it, for the reason that it appears to place additional burdens and apportion impractical and potentially onerous rights. It would be injected into the Bill in its closing stages when we do not have the capacity as a House either to examine the issues or to reflect on the Electronic Telecommunications Code and the impact of the new rights being given to operators. My approach is that it is best not to introduce additional complexities to Bills during ping-pong.

However, I intervened on the Bill as far back as 19 May 2020 with my amendment to prevent vendors defined by the National Cyber Security Centre as high-risk. From the outset, I welcomed the aims of the Bill. My intentions were narrow and were to protect our critical infrastructure and, by definition, since that is built for the longer term—20, 30 or perhaps 40 years—to protect it from being compromised by firms that today might seem benign but in the long term may be able to jeopardise our security as technology becomes more complex.

My amendment was described as being anti-Huawei, although its wording was much broader. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to other noble Lords who joined me in that endeavour because I was constantly being told by the Government Benches that the amendment was inappropriate. However, the noble Lords, Lord Alton of Liverpool, Lord Forsyth of Drumlean, and Lord Adonis, stuck with me as we continued to argue that Huawei or, indeed, any other future telecoms provider that might jeopardise our national security should be removed from being able to operate with impunity in this country.

I truly regret that the Bill was delayed in our seeking those safeguards, but that is what we exist for here as a scrutinising Chamber. We give the Government an opportunity to think again and that is what has happened through those amendments. We currently have before us in the Telecommunications (Security) Bill the right place to discuss those matters as we go forward, and the Government have also seen the light of day on the use of Huawei.

I therefore thank the Minister for her openness throughout the year in having given us valuable time and discussing where we might go with our amendment. I thank all noble Lords who participated in the Bill for having put up with us and a slightly otiose amendment. Nevertheless, we got there in the end.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her comprehensive introduction. I agree with her emphasis on the importance of internet services and the need to eliminate digital exclusion. It is hard to think what the consequences would have been if we had suffered this pandemic just 10 years ago, when our broadband services were less extensive and much slower than now.

In the name of inclusivity, I welcome the first part of today's business, Motion A. Throughout the course of the Bill, my noble friend Lord Fox, the noble Lords, Lord Stevenson of Balmacara and Lord Liddle, the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh of Pickering, and others have been arguing for as inclusive a definition

[LORD CLEMENT-JONES]

as possible of those who could be regarded as tenants, without straying into the territory of licensees or licences. It includes those with assured shorthold tenancies or assured tenancy agreements, as well as students living in short-term lets, where a tenant has, or tenants have, exclusive possession of the let property.

We have been concerned throughout to ensure that all tenancies such as renewable tenancies are included, even if they are not, strictly speaking, leases and that there should not be any grey areas that need to be interpreted by the courts. I am pleased that the Government have now produced an even more inclusive definition than the one that I argued for on Report. My sincere thanks go to the Minister and the Bill team for their care and consideration on what we have always regarded as an important issue.

However, I do not welcome Motion B. The original purpose of the amendment in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, which was strongly supported on these Benches—I remind the noble Baroness, Lady Falkner, that it was introduced not at ping-pong but on Report—was to ensure that the code is fit for the purpose of delivering the Government’s manifesto commitment of broadband capable of 1 gigabit per second to every home by 2025. The need for this has become even more important, particularly since the Covid-19 lockdown has demonstrated our increasing dependence on good broadband connectivity for remote working, education and many other aspects of life, as the Minister mentioned.

Sadly, it is clear that the Government are backtracking in their ambitions—the 2025 1 gigabit per second target has been watered down and the budget for rollout expenditure slashed by two-thirds. Even so, it is clear that the Electronic Communications Code needs regular review to ensure that the Government’s objective, however watered down, is met and that operators have all the rights under the code that they need.

My noble friend Lord Fox rightly commented on a universal service obligation of a miserable 10 megabits per second and I completely agree with him. However, looking to the future, I am glad that during the course of the Bill we have started a genuine debate around whether we can describe broadband as a utility and what the appropriate rights of entry are.

I am also grateful to the noble Baroness for answering what the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, described as a blizzard of questions on telecoms supply chain diversification in her extremely informative letter last month. Some of the work being carried out on open RAN, mentioned by my noble friend Lord Fox, is groundbreaking for the interoperability and competitiveness of our 5G networks. It is good to see that international collaboration is regarded as essential and is ongoing.

However, at the end of the day I am left with a sense of bafflement. This has been a ridiculously modest Bill, given the challenges of the broadband and 5G rollout ahead. Of course, as the Minister has mentioned, we now have *Access to Land: Consultation on Changes to the Electronic Communications Code*, which was issued in January. Notwithstanding this Bill, it seems clear the Government think that further changes are needed to clarify the position on rights to upgrade and share. Why not an earlier consultation? Why were

these issues not considered before this piece of legislation? Are these long-standing questions or are they thoughts that have arisen during the course of the Bill? Is there another Bill on the way? We know from the representations made that the operators are calling for other changes that are not included in the Bill or the consultation.

I have another quote from Matt Warman. In his introduction to the consultation he says:

“The government is committed to ensuring that the Code is fit for purpose in order to deliver our digital connectivity targets.”

That is excellent. A review of the kind envisaged in our amendment would have been perfect for that purpose. The Bill has taken an inordinate time to get through, but it is clear that more reforms are in the pipeline. The question remains: could we have been spending our time better and enacting a more comprehensive Bill with a wider range of revisions, instead of this piecemeal approach?

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab) [V]: My Lords, like others, I start by joining the Minister in thanking all our digital providers for the work that they have been doing during the pandemic, which, of course, will continue for some time to come. I hope that it will provide the basis for a learning experience about what it means to live in the digital economy that we all share hopes for.

As the Minister said when she introduced the Motions, this Bill is a modest one. However, when she says that it affects some 10 million people, that means that it has important implications. We never objected to the ideas behind the Bill and, indeed, wanted to help as much as we could to make sure that it became law as quickly as possible and allowed access to the digital economy that is so necessary in the modern world to people who otherwise would not have had it because of problems with their freeholder. We must accept that broadband is a utility.

I welcome the Government’s amendment. I think that the right word has been used, in that it “improves” the amendment originally moved by the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, on Report, which we also supported, to try to make sense of the definitions in terms of who was to be affected, whether it was leaseholders, renters or whatever. The language is much better as a result and that is good.

Unfortunately, the removal of the amendment just discussed by the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, seems to have a bit of a downside. I talked with the Minister before we got to this stage in proceedings and made it clear that we would not insist on our amendment being retained within the Bill. I think that we did that more in sadness than in a spirit of support, because it relates to important issues that have been raised in today’s debate.

The Minister was kind enough to praise our aspirations for the Bill, but she was also rather devastating in demolishing all the points that I thought that we had broadly agreed were important. She pointed out how inept our drafting was and how problematic it would have been had the amendment stayed within the Bill. Such are the joys of opposition. We are never going to achieve the skills of the draftsmen available to the Government. I wish that sometimes more credit would be given to the ideas that we have put forward, rather than worrying about their expression.

At the end of the day, I suppose that the consultation on the Electronic Communications Code announced by the Government in January does the trick on some of the issues underlying our amendment. However, as the noble Lords, Lord Clement-Jones and Lord Fox, said, it also exposes that fact that a large number of wider issues, often led by other departments in government, still have not been resolved. I urge the Government to push forward on the permitted development issues and on the street works, including the need for the antennae and cabinets that will be required if the 5G support for the 1 gigabit-enabled economy is ever to see the light of day.

I could delay the House with a further discussion of the need for much more ambitious targets, a better USO and more investment, but these have been covered and this Bill is not really the right place for them. I leave my comments with a question for the Minister: does she have in her mind a route map for how we are to achieve the 1 gigabit per second-enabled infrastructure? I am confident that, since this issue will not go away, we will be resuming discussion of it in the not-too-distant future.

Finally, I share the Minister's concern that the telecoms operators, which we have praised already for the work that they have done during this pandemic, should continue to get the best tools and the best access so that they can continue to innovate and provide superfast quality broadband to as many people as possible. Unfortunately, I harbour a niggling concern, rather like the noble Lords, Lord Fox and Lord Clement-Jones, that one problem that will get in the way of this delivery is the scope and scale of the current Electronic Communications Code. As the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, said, is not the real question how we are to get beyond that to think again about how a utility as important as the internet can be allowed to be installed without the current plethora of planning and other restrictions, and control of the streetscape and the environment in which it has to be inserted, being in the hands of other departments? It seems to suggest that more work is required, but that is for another day.

4.30 pm

Baroness Barran (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords for their helpful contributions to the debate and I will respond to some of the questions that have been raised. I start by sharing the aspiration of the noble Lord, Lord Fox, that future Bills should move more smoothly. I shall try not to take too much personal responsibility for the pace of this Bill, but I know he will accept that the breadth of Bills can slow them down. There is a tension between wishing that there could have been more in this legislation and the speed of its progress.

Along with the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, the noble Lord, Lord Fox, raised questions about our diversification strategy and its progress, particularly in relation to open RAN. I want to reassure all noble Lords that we have made early progress in our work to accelerate the development of open interface solutions by committing to work with NEC to launch the NeutrORAN test bed as part of the wider 5G test beds and trials programme that will showcase 5G open RAN technology. As noble Lords are aware, our

strategy in this area is backed by an initial investment of £250 million to kick off this work. We are trying to take a balanced approach to this diversification, which will see measures introduced across three separate strands of activity; that is, by supporting incumbent suppliers such as Ericsson and Nokia, as well as attracting new suppliers into the UK market and, as I said, accelerating open interface solutions and deployment.

The noble Lord, Lord Fox, asked why we are nervous about a review. I do not think we are nervous and I hope I have made it clear that we do not think that that kind of review is necessary given the level of scrutiny already given by Ofcom and Select Committees across both Houses.

The noble Baroness, Lady Falkner of Margravine, asked about the vital issue of network security. As she will know, the Telecommunications (Security) Bill being debated in the other place introduces a stronger security framework for all UK public telecom providers. It will ensure that providers design and manage their networks in a secure way. In response to her point about future-proofing the legislation, the Bill will introduce a new national security power to manage the risks posed by high-risk vendors in our telecom networks both now and into the future.

The noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, asked about the universal service obligation. We will keep the speed and quality parameters of the USO under review to make sure that it keeps pace with consumers' evolving needs.

I must offer an apology to the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson of Balmacara, if I was critical of any of his drafting skills, which will certainly be vastly superior to anything I could manage. I am genuine in saying that the Government are very grateful to him for raising important issues, including how we should tackle the matters that cut across different government departments and their different legislative responsibilities, which are so crucial.

The noble Lord also challenged the Government's ambition in this area. As he will know, by 2025, the Government are targeting a minimum of 85% of gigabit-capable coverage, but we will seek to accelerate rollout further to get as close to 100% as possible. That target is based on extensive engagement with the industry over the past year as well as the current industry rates of deployment and how those may be increased. We have also made a major investment of £5 billion in the UK gigabit programme, which has galvanised commercial build in the market.

In closing, I was reminded while listening to noble Lords of my low point on this Bill. It was when my own internet connection failed while we were all working remotely. I think it happened during the Committee stage and I was unable to use my video camera, so I have had a personal interest in this. I close by thanking again the Bill team, who have been enormously knowledgeable, professional and helpful in supporting me and, I know, a number of noble Lords through the passage of the Bill. I thank all noble Lords for their scrutiny, their challenge and the quality of the debate and I commend the Motions to the House.

Motions A and B agreed.

House adjourned at 4.36 pm.

Grand Committee

Thursday 4 March 2021

The Grand Committee met in a hybrid proceeding.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

2.30 pm

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): My Lords, the hybrid Grand Committee will now begin. Some Members are here in person, respecting social distancing, others are participating remotely, but all Members will be treated equally. I must ask Members in the Room to wear a face covering, except when seated at their desk, to speak sitting down, and to wipe down their desk, chair and any other touch points before and after use. If the capacity of the Committee Room is exceeded or other safety requirements are breached, I will immediately adjourn the Committee. If there is a Division in the House, the Committee will adjourn for five minutes.

The first business is a Question for Short Debate on the steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to promote anti-slavery projects throughout the Commonwealth. The time limit for this debate is one hour. I believe that the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, is on the call.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): My Lords, I suggest that we adjourn for two minutes while we make sure that the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, can hear us and we can hear him.

2.31 pm

Sitting suspended.

Anti-slavery Projects: Commonwealth

Question for Short Debate

2.33 pm

Asked by Lord Chidgey

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to promote anti-slavery projects throughout the Commonwealth

Lord Chidgey (LD) [V]: My Lords, slavery is not a relic of history. It remains embedded in communities and economies throughout the world. Not so long ago, in Liberia, I was in discussions with a development project officer in the north of the country, close to the Sierra Leone border. Liberia's origins as an independent state are from resettled freed slaves from the United States in the 1800s, courtesy of the American Colonization Society. I was shocked, therefore, when the official calmly recounted that, as a young girl, his aunt had been captured by marauding tribesmen and taken into slavery in a neighbouring country, only to return home some years later, having travelled hundreds of miles to get there—apparently a matter-of-fact, everyday misadventure.

This debate confines itself to anti-slavery projects in the Commonwealth, focusing in the main on Asia and Africa. The continent of Africa is one of the regions where contemporary slavery is most rife. Slavery

in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa exists among racial and cultural boundaries in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan. Slavery exists in other forms in parts of Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria. Human trafficking and the enslavement of children as child soldiers and child labourers takes place from Togo, Benin and Nigeria to Gabon and Cameroon. According to Anti-Slavery International, modern-day slavery in Africa includes the exploitation of subjugate populations, even when their condition is not technically called slavery. To quote the society:

“People are sold like objects, forced to work for little or no pay and are at the mercy of their ‘employers’.”

Debt slavery or bonded labour is the most common method of enslavement, with more than 8 million people bonded to labour illegally. Some 90% of the practice in the world is prevalent mainly in south Asia, even though most countries in the region are party to the UN convention on the abolition of slavery. Bonded labour has produced goods ranging from frozen shrimp to bricks, diamonds and clothing. Estimates vary widely, with figures of between 20 million and 40 million workers, mainly children, working through debt bondage in India. Some 60,000 brick kiln workers are employed in south Asia, with 70% in India and the 6,000 or so kilns in Pakistan alone. Total revenue from brick kilns in south Asia is thought to be some \$15 billion. The International Labour Organization estimates that more than \$51 billion is made annually in the exploitation of workers through debt bondage. The fair trade industry, which claims to eradicate modern-day slavery, is estimated by some to exceed \$2 billion annually, but that is only a fraction of the total revenue.

The excellent briefing note produced by the House of Lords estimates that there are some 16 million victims of modern slavery living in the Commonwealth, which equates to one in every 150 citizens. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the CHRI, in Delhi, stresses in its report *Eradicating Modern Slavery* that only 10 years remain to fulfil the London CHOGM commitment to meet SDG target 8.7 of ending modern slavery by 2030. The CHRI stresses that the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in the system for protection and the vulnerability of those most at risk. The CHRI is calling on the Commonwealth Secretariat to take a lead in the interests of the 16 million Commonwealth citizens trapped in modern slavery.

At this point, it is worth stressing the scale of the task. According to the CHRI, of the 54 Commonwealth member states, only 29 have national guidelines on how to identify victims, 35 have criminalised forced labour and just 18 have criminalised forced marriage. All 54 have gaps in implementation. The Lords Library briefing notes that the CHRI claims there has been inadequate action by Commonwealth Governments, and that overall progress is far too slow. I would be grateful if the Minister could comment on the CHRI claims.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Unit has responded to the 2018 London CHOGM call for effective measures to end modern slavery. It is working with member states' missions in Geneva, the CHRI in Delhi and the UN special rapporteur on eradicating contemporary forms of slavery. The Commonwealth Secretariat's strategic plan embeds the CHOGM mandate,

[LORD CHIDGEY]

committing it to protecting women, girls and other vulnerable groups in member states from violence and other harmful practices.

The Global Fund to End Modern Slavery recognises the UK as a global leader in the fight to end modern slavery, as a founding partner in creating the fund. It is undertaking innovative work throughout the Commonwealth, including in India, Bangladesh, Kenya and Uganda. It has called for a reassessment of how the UK can lead an increase in global collaboration and resourcing to prevent a huge surge in modern slavery as the pandemic ends.

The CPA UK's four-year multilateral modern slavery project, funded by the UK, provides a welcome signpost. The project aims to strengthen democracy, parliamentary oversight and sustainability in the Commonwealth. It aims to equip, enable and encourage partners and their members to make positive impacts in three crucial areas: public accounts committees, women in parliament and climate security. The CPA UK's work plans to support good governance and stimulate parliamentary activity in areas of inclusive and representative democracy, effective scrutiny and accountability.

The assessment of the UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme by the Independent Commission on Aid Impact takes us a stage further. Under the guidance of the commissioner, Sir Hugh Bayley, the ICAI report of October 2020 assessed that the Government played a prominent role in raising the profile of modern slavery globally, but that our work in developing countries had limited long-term impact, did not build on existing international efforts and experience, and failed to adequately involve survivors. Overall, the ICAI assessment was amber-red.

The ICAI set out its findings in detail, together with a list of five recommendations, three of which the Government accept and a further two they partially accept. This is a heartening response from the Government, stressing their commitment to defeating slavery. Investment in the Modern Slavery Innovation Fund has been reviewed, and confirmation sought that it is working in sectors and with partners in ways that are known to make a difference. The Government confirm that UK aid is governed by the International Development Act, which places a duty to promote gender equality through development and humanitarian funding in countries receiving aid.

The Government accept that they need to do more to engage survivors in the design, implementation and review of the programmes in their modern slavery portfolio. The Government agree that a public statement will help to explain better their international modern slavery objectives, which they plan to take forward and set out this year. With just 10 years left to meet the SDG goal, will the Government strengthen their leadership in the global effort to support the work of the CPA UK, ring-fencing this and other anti-slavery funding from cuts to the aid budget?

2.42 pm

Baroness Goudie (Lab) (V): My Lords, I thank my friend, the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for arranging this debate. It is absolutely necessary in this situation, as we come out of the pandemic.

Many in the developing countries of the Commonwealth have suffered hugely during the pandemic and have been persuaded by traffickers to let their children go and be sold, with false promises of work; body parts are stolen, such as kidneys, eyes and others. People who are involved in slavery never recover and never have a long life.

The Commonwealth must commit to following the money. We know through the McCain Institute, the Global Fund and others that this is a cash industry, and the cash trail can be followed if the will is there. In many cases, as I have mentioned before, the money is offshore, and it is for us as a leading country—we are seen as seventh or eighth in the global economy, and we are at every table—to exert pressure so that cash from trafficking is followed and the traffickers are taken and sentenced. They should be sentenced to prison for what they are doing to those whom they take away. I call on the Government to persuade Commonwealth countries and the Commonwealth to follow the money.

2.44 pm

Lord Haselhurst (Con) [V]: My Lords, the Commonwealth charter tells us that

“Parliaments ... are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance.”

The Commonwealth Heads of Government say they are committed to ending modern slavery by 2030, but, alas, progress is very slow. It is therefore essential that Governments are held accountable by their Parliaments, constantly and unremittingly. As a former chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I believe that the CPA is the network by which MPs throughout the Commonwealth can draw strength and encouragement to discuss these issues frankly, which is often the better way, and informally, and to identify means to confront them.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, was right to refer to the CPA UK Modern Slavery Project as a practical example of how this evil can be exposed and curbed. However, if we are to eradicate modern slavery in all its forms, it is a campaign that needs many more hours than one of debate devoted to it.

2.45 pm

Baroness D'Souza (CB) [V]: My Lords, it is somehow fitting that Commonwealth Day and International Women's Day fall on the same date; there is much to celebrate jointly. I am in no doubt that, in the post-Brexit world, where there continues to be much confusion, an alliance as old and trusted as the Commonwealth has much to offer. All countries need friends and allies, and the UK has a ready-made community of 53 nations around the world, which is a precious asset and one to be nurtured.

As noble Lords have already heard, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, of which I am a long-term and proud member, is addressing issues of current concern such as modern slavery, women in Parliament, climate change and the seemingly less important topic of public accounts committees. Never have I been more impressed than when talking with a group of women parliamentarians, convened by the CPA and all members of their respective public accounts committees, who

were making real differences in countering corruption, raising the standards of accountability and providing a clear model for what other women can achieve. In these practical workshops the CPA continues to provide an invaluable role and contributes to a change of culture around the world.

2.46 pm

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: My Lords, anti-slavery has been a major focus of the Church of England through the Clewer Initiative in this country and through many of our links across the Anglican Communion in Commonwealth countries, where partnership is the key to effective work.

The Anglican Alliance has raised a number of questions and initiatives at United Nations level, but the most powerful agents of change are rooted in local communities in some of the most vulnerable places. It seems to be very important that we hold together the high-level conversations along with local initiatives, where the local networks are often key to the effective rooting-out or identification of perpetrators of modern slavery. I ask the Minister if the Government can use their powers to work in partnership at every level to eradicate this scourge?

2.48 pm

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab) [V]: My Lords, development projects are essential to tackling slavery. It is therefore shameful and inhumane that, at this time when more and more boys and girls—particularly girls—around the world could be drawn into slavery because of economic conditions created by the pandemic, the UK is going to brutally reduce the amount of money available for humanitarian projects that empower and educate young women and boys and support refugees.

However, the UK can also support projects that ensure enforcement, as my noble friend Lady Goudie has said. I ask the Minister what action we will take to ensure that there is stronger enforcement at the national, regional and international level to have more prosecutions of those organising slavery and those who assist them?

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): The noble Lord, Lord Dholakia, has withdrawn from the debate, so I call the noble Lord, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth.

2.49 pm

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Con) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, on securing this debate ahead of Commonwealth Day on 8 March. The theme for this year's Commonwealth Day is "Delivering a common future: connecting, innovating and transforming". Clearly, promoting anti-slavery projects is central to this and a real challenge of our age.

It is dreadful to realise that there are over 40 million victims of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking worldwide, and that this number is growing. Our own Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has been active, and, between 2016 and 2020, delivered a four-year project funded by the United Kingdom

Government, providing advice and support to Commonwealth legislatures in the pursuit of combating modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour. This is a good thing.

If I could single out one particular project that the UK is backing, it is the attempt to end forced labour in clothing factories in Bangladesh. This is most worthwhile.

2.50 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB) [V]: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, has a way of highlighting issues which concern the very poorest, and we must be grateful to him because the Commonwealth as an institution needs much more focus and visibility.

While I was on the anti-slavery council I became aware of appalling examples of slavery and trafficking, including among the victims of the caste system which persists in India today. Since then, an enormous amount has been done to ensure that we in the UK are not benefiting from supply chains that exploit those victims, especially child slaves.

The Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, in her lecture last year, said that half the world's victims of slavery live in the Commonwealth and called for more UK action on child trafficking. ICAI is not pleased, as we have heard, and the CHRI has a programme tied to SDG 8.7, which means ending child labour by 2025—there is a challenge. I put my faith in NGOs and faith groups, but civil society has a huge potential to bring about change.

2.51 pm

Baroness Massey of Darwen (Lab) [V]: My Lords, heinous acts of slavery go back a long way, perpetrated by power and carried out by persecution. We have redefined slavery in modern terms but it still involves power and persecution in many different forms, and it exists in developed countries such as the UK.

I am pleased that many UK-funded organisations, such as DfID and the CPA, are funding and developing projects to combat modern slavery, including support at government level and, essentially, as the right reverend Prelate said, at grass-roots level, involving NGOs and community projects. I congratulate the many NGOs that are working on the ground, often in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances, to combat many kinds of slavery involving local populations.

Can the Minister say briefly how programmes supported by the UK are monitored and evaluated for their impact on the lives of victims of modern slavery? I look forward to his response.

2.52 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, if we are to try to stop people entering into modern slavery, what encouragement is coming from the Government to make sure people know what is liable to happen to them if they place themselves in debt bondage or the hands of human traffickers? This can be done only by targeted information in the country of origin of such people. Is it being done in a way that they will receive it? What is the strategy for using social media and local broadcasters?

[LORD ADDINGTON]

Without targeting the direct options, and saying where people are lied to and where the problems lie, we will not see people remove themselves from such situations. We may not be able to do anything about people being coerced into these situations but we might be able to slow down the numbers of those who think that they are doing it for good economic reasons.

2.53 pm

Lord Davies of Gower (Con) [V]: My Lords, I speak as a very proud executive member of our own UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association here at Westminster. As we celebrate Commonwealth Day next Monday, we must take special note of its work fostering relationships and sharing experiences and challenges, which of course includes the fight against slavery. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has, since 1911, brought together the Parliaments of the Commonwealth to better understand and learn from each other.

The UK has been a global leader in the fight to end modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking. In 2017, the UK Government became a founding partner in creating the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery. Since then, they have been able to leverage the initial UK investment more than fourfold by securing complementary investments from other Governments. Last year, the UK Government published their first modern slavery statement, outlining the steps that the Government have taken to tackle modern slavery in UK operations and supply chains.

I urge the Government to continue to support the eradication of slavery, and I very much look forward to hearing my noble friend the Minister's response on further promoting anti-slavery throughout the Commonwealth.

2.55 pm

Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest in that I have competed at the Commonwealth Games and I am a trustee of the Commonwealth Sport Foundation. CSF is a new charity that has a number of work pillars, including historical injustice, equal rights and youth empowerment.

The Commonwealth is a third of the world's population and has a significant number of modern slavery issues. It is exciting that, next year, the Commonwealth Games will be held in Birmingham. The organising committee is committed to this issue, and it is something that I hope further major games will also take on board through their processes.

We should continue to explore the role that the Commonwealth Games Federation, the Commonwealth Sports Foundation and each host city has to educate the athletes, coaches and spectators on this important issue in order not just to broaden the understanding of modern slavery but to identify it and to find solutions.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): The noble Lord, Lord Jones of Cheltenham, has withdrawn, so I call the noble Lord, Lord Randall of Uxbridge.

2.56 pm

Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest as the deputy chairman of the Human Trafficking Foundation. In this extremely short contribution, I will simply make a practical suggestion regarding modern slavery in supply chains—something we should be clamping down on. My noble friend should look into what the US has done to try to remedy this in respect of what it calls “hot goods”, that is to say goods that are produced by forced labour. They have the following clause in their legislation:

“All goods, wares, articles, and merchandise mined, produced, or manufactured wholly or in part in any foreign country by convict labor or/and forced labor or/and indentured labor under penal sanctions shall not be entitled to entry at any of the ports of the United States, and the importation thereof is hereby prohibited”. This seems a very useful idea, and perhaps something that we could still insert in the Trade Bill.

2.57 pm

Lord Hogan-Howe (CB) [V]: My Lords, I support that suggestion from the noble Lord, Lord Randall; it is a good idea. I declare my interest as a trustee of the charity Arise, which I thank for its briefing.

Can the Government commit to a modern slavery strategy in Commonwealth countries that ensures that support focuses on empowering and building the capacity of local civil society groups, such as local police, religious sisters and local government? Just one example would be the Indian-Nepalese border, which is one of the most prolific corridors for human trafficking in the world. In 2018, it was estimated that 50 women alone were trafficked into India a day, and 2,500 children trafficked annually into Bihar, one of five Indian states bordering Nepal. Horrifically, most of these children are headed for the brothels in India.

We should prioritise partnerships that empower and strengthen local communities, which are best placed to ensure sustainable change and to identify victims. It is hard for Governments to prioritise these groups, but we should prioritise building their capacity and commit to supporting small-scale sustainable efforts to end this horrific crime, since they are usually the best catalyst for real and lasting change.

2.58 pm

Lord Desai (Non-Aff): My Lords, I will talk about the UK—it is part of the Commonwealth, so I think I am allowed. I was approached by somebody, though only once before coronavirus stopped any further conversation, about the fact that there are people who came here to the UK illegally and are subject to rather severe exploitation. I am sorry that that person did not come back to me, but they made a request as to whether some sort of amnesty could be declared for people who may have entered the UK in that way. They would gain by handing themselves up to the authorities, rather than suffering as they do right now. I do not know whether this is part of the debate at present but I signed up to speak to make sure that it was declared here. I am very happy to talk to the Minister outside the Grand Committee.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): I call the noble Lord, Lord Roberts

of Llandudno. Lord Roberts, you are on mute; can you unmute? We will come back to the noble Lord at the end if we can.

3 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB) [V]: My Lords, could the Minister say whether there is support in the Government for the calls from the Arise Foundation, a charity of which I am a trustee, for mandatory human rights due diligence and mandatory transparency guidelines through company supply chains?

Building on the UK's landmark 2015 legislation, and in the spirit of William Wilberforce, we should be spearheading a global Commonwealth campaign to combat modern-day slavery. This should include educational projects to liberate the children of India's enslaved Dalits and Adivasis, condemned to work in kilns and sweat shops. It could include kite marking of supply chains so that consumers can say no to big brands using African child slaves to mine lithium in the DRC. It could include a Commonwealth-wide boycott of cotton products made by enslaved Uighur labour in Xinjiang. It could also hunt down and fearlessly prosecute the criminals who ruthlessly traffic women and girls.

Almost a third of the world's population—2.2 billion people—live in Commonwealth countries. By mobilising its people against modern slavery, the Commonwealth could both demonstrate its values and give hope to millions of benighted and downtrodden people.

3.01 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP) [V]: My Lords, I go to the typically excellent House of Lords Library briefing for the estimate that 40% of the total number of victims of modern slavery live in the Commonwealth. Not being “political”, it did not make the obvious comparison: only 33% of the world's population live in the Commonwealth. We have an outsized, disgraceful modern slavery problem in an institution for which we as a nation have a particular responsibility.

Where did the Commonwealth come from? It grew essentially out of the Empire, whose disastrous, genocidal, ecocidal impacts have been buried, hidden and all too often forgotten about. The thesis I put to the Minister is that colonialism and modern slavery are inextricably linked, and tackling the current scourge requires exposing the dark history to the light. Last year, I asked the Minister whether the Government would consider an inquiry into particularly the legacies of African enslavement. I got a one-sentence “no” answer. Will the Minister now reconsider?

3.02 pm

Baroness Warsi (Con) [V]: My Lords, the task of adding to this debate in just a minute seems almost impossible so I will keep my remarks just to two questions. First, the anti-slavery work is funded by a number of UK government departments and funds. Can my noble friend say how co-ordinated are the work and the funds across, for a start, the Home Office and the FCDO, but also any other departments that may be involved? Secondly, how do the Government reconcile their strongly held commitment to anti-slavery

with their less than enthusiastic support for the genocide amendment that has now been proposed in both Houses in a number of Bills to tackle the appalling treatment of the Uighurs in China?

3.03 pm

Lord Roberts of Llandudno (LD) [V]: Nothing causes more slavery in its consequences than war. One thing we can do is to try to reduce the armaments sold to nations that will then go on to slaughter one another. We know, for instance, that in Yemen we now have 8.4 million people on the brink of slavery and starvation. We see that the UK has now decided to cut its aid budget to Yemen from £164 million to £87 million, while at the same time selling about £638 million-worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, the other country in this dispute. Is there not something we can do to stop ourselves from this trade? Is there not a William Wilberforce now in the Cabinet?

3.04 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I commend my noble friend Lord Chidgey for bringing this debate to the Grand Committee and commend the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK. I declare an interest in that I supported the CPA's anti-forced labour project here in the Westminster Parliament and in Ghana. I also declare that I support a project in Sudan and the Horn of Africa, linking in with the Gulf, on human trafficking and forced labour.

Because time is so constrained, I make two points and ask two questions of the Minister. First, the inevitable consequences of Covid mean that the scope for forced labour and trafficking is greatly increased, with the increase in the number of vulnerable women and children, especially those working in markets or domestic labour. Therefore, the unlawful cuts to the UK's ODA are very regrettable. Secondly, there have been attempts in the Trade Bill to persuade the Government to move on supply chains—in fact, I raised this in our most recent deliberations on that Bill—and I hope that the Government think again.

I have two quick questions, building on one of the points that my noble friend Lord Chidgey asked. Will the Government use their convening power for all Commonwealth countries to work so there is a consistency of definition and application of forced labour legislation? Secondly, will the UK use its chair-in-office transition to Rwanda to make sure that this continues to be a priority area, including for Governments and traditional forms of government and traditional leaders? The convening power of the Commonwealth is to its credit and something that we can ensure goes forward with the new presidency, so there is no gap in any programme that we have discussed today.

3.06 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, just to pick up the last point by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, in relation to the UK's investment in the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, it has galvanised political support for legislation in the Commonwealth. I hope that the Minister this afternoon will be able to commit to ongoing work in that regard.

[LORD COLLINS OF Highbury]

I pick up on a couple of points on domestic legislation, particularly in relation to the supply chain. Dominic Raab, in his Statement on China in January, set out steps on forced labour under the Modern Slavery Act. I therefore ask about progress on those steps and, in particular, in relation to fines for failing transparency obligations. When will we see the necessary legislation? On the extension of transparency requirements to the public sector, when will we see the guidance from the FCDO and Cabinet Office in that regard?

Finally, what is the Minister's assessment of the impact of the ODA reduction to 0.5% on programmes that encourage anti-slavery legislation across the Commonwealth? How will the Government lead on that priority subject at the CHOGM in Rwanda?

3.07 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):

My Lords, first, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for tabling this debate and all noble Lords who have spoken, particularly the noble Lord. We have worked together on various issues relating to the Commonwealth, and it is important that we throw a spotlight on this important issue. I agree with my noble friend Lord Haselhurst that one hour was not enough, but I have very much valued the constructive discussions, suggestions and proposals, as well as the questions put today.

The noble Lord, Lord Roberts, talked of reviving the spirit of William Wilberforce. It is not lost on me that, on every walk past my home to the local village, I pass a sign that says, "William Wilberforce lived here". It is perhaps apt that a politician who led our country, Theresa May, herself a Wimbledonian, led the campaign domestically to raise the issue of modern slavery, and continues to champion this cause—and I shall continue to work with the right honourable lady in this respect.

Modern slavery is one of those great human rights tragedies of our time; it is an incredibly complex issue that targets the most vulnerable, as we have heard, and Covid-19 has only made things worse. I listened very carefully to the words of the noble Lord, Lord Addington, about focusing on support for victims both domestically and abroad, and I shall come on to that in a moment. It is right that we build on what we have learned, be it domestically or through international partners and ensure that this is shared throughout the Commonwealth, also ensuring that those who employ child labour and engage in modern slavery as we term it are held to account and educated in their role in tackling this scourge. A scourge it is, which is why it remains a major priority for the UK Government.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, suggested a series of steps and in doing so highlighted the opportunities that exist to do so much more. In the time I have I cannot address every specific question or suggestion that he and other noble Lords raised, but I will focus on some of them. I will come back to noble Lords, and I look forward to further discussions, as the noble Lord, Lord Desai, suggested, to take various points forward outside this Committee.

It was not customary to hear a contribution from my noble friend Lady Warsi in a minute, but she was nevertheless succinct in asking quite specific questions

on governance. I assure her that the Home Office and the FCDO work together regularly at ministerial level and between officials. We are looking at all our programmes across government for further support in this respect. We have appointed both domestic and international envoys to take this forward; there are well-established channels in this respect. My noble friend also mentioned the genocide amendment and supply chains, which I will come on to in a moment.

I pay tribute to and agree in totality with the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson. The Commonwealth Games provide an incredible opportunity for us to take forward the issues of child labour and modern slavery, but also the benefits that the Commonwealth can bring in working together.

Looking at the Commonwealth and the world as a whole, in 2016 global estimates on modern slavery found that just over 40 million people were victims of modern slavery on any given day somewhere in the world. Of these, 24.9 million people were forced into labour and 15.4 million were living in a forced marriage. As the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, reminded us, one in four were children, and 71% were women. I know that that is a particular focus for the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie. Commonwealth citizens accounted for almost 25 million of that global figure.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, that there is so much still to be done to strengthen the work of the Commonwealth, particularly with CHOGM on the horizon and our role in handing over the chairmanship to Rwanda. I assure the noble Lord that I am working very closely with the Rwandan Government. Indeed, only today I spoke to Foreign Minister Biruta about various issues, including the planning for CHOGM later this year.

The International Labour Organization estimates that trade in human beings is worth \$150 billion per year, yet just 0.08% of that amount is spent by OECD countries annually on development assistance targeting slavery. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, highlighted the importance of continuing programmes and funding to tackle this, from the perspective not just of the UK but of how we leverage international funding. The sheer staggering scale of human suffering this represents is frankly, bluntly, and, to put it in a very personal way, shameful. There is no other word for it.

Tackling modern slavery was an important part of the Government's manifesto in 2019 and I assure noble Lords that it will continue to form part of our integrated strategy. The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, talked about the legacy of our colonial past, the Commonwealth's future and specific inquiries. I respect her contribution, but we should also celebrate and recognise the strength of what the Commonwealth is today in 2021. We are learning from our past and our experiences. On a personal note, as someone who has heritage from India and Pakistan, whose wife grew up in Australia, and who now looks after our relationships with south Asia, it is a reflection of the strides we are making not just in government but across society that people enriched by their Commonwealth heritage contribute to the United Kingdom's progress today.

The new FCDO brings together diplomatic and development expertise. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leeds talked about the importance of civil

society and faith groups. I assure him that, since the creation of the FCDO, I have initiated regular round-table discussions with our faith partners, who are involved directly in humanitarian aid delivery and development programmes, including tackling child labour across different parts of the world.

It is not acceptable that crimes such as modern slavery still exist in the 21st century—I totally agree with noble Lords on that—but the short fact is that they do. As a long-standing champion of the need to tackle the global scourge of modern slavery, including within the Commonwealth, we will continue to play our part. That is why I am proud of the fact that we led on addressing this with our Modern Slavery Act back in 2015.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, talked of the importance of different roles and the creation of the role of the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner. Internationally, we successfully led the way in 2015 by developing and championing the inclusion in the sustainable development goals of a specific target to end modern slavery, which is SDG Target 8.7. However, there is so much still to be done.

At the UN General Assembly, alongside the UN Secretary-General, we launched *A Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking*. This is a strong statement of intent that we will not tolerate modern slavery in our societies. I led the UK campaign in 2018, ahead of the CHOGM in London, to obtain commitments to, and gather endorsements for, the call to action by Commonwealth countries. My noble friend Lord Davies talked of what has been achieved. I can inform him that the call to action, led by the United Kingdom, has to date received 92 endorsements, which is nearly half of all UN members; included within them are 27 Commonwealth countries. In 2018, we committed to more than doubling, to £200 million, our ODA support that is targeted at tackling the root causes of slavery and exploitation.

Many projects exist across the Commonwealth and I will share just a few with noble Lords. The noble Baroness, Lady Massey, talked about effectiveness. The Work in Freedom programme helps to prevent trafficking and exploitation of women working in domestic households and garment factories across south Asia and the Middle East. Bangladesh was mentioned by noble Lords, and that specific programme has so far reached over 470,000 women and girls, including in India and Bangladesh. I know that my noble friend Lord Bourne was very focused on what has been achieved there.

The Inclusion, Accountability and Reducing Modern Slavery Programme in Pakistan raises community awareness on issues of early and forced marriage, and child labour. It supports 450 Aagahi Centres that work on cases of modern slavery, and strengthens government systems within Pakistan for protecting individuals. Meanwhile the Stamping Out Slavery in Nigeria programme is supporting a coalition of actors, including the Government and local civil society, in tackling modern slavery there.

The CPA was rightly mentioned by others, including the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza. I have met and engaged directly with the leadership of the CPA over recent months, including looking at the specific issue

of public accounts and the crucial role that the CPA continues to play through its network of 32 parliamentary champions in improving anti-slavery legislation.

We also recognise the crucial role of business. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, alluded to this, as did the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, and others. Championing the UN *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* is all about responsible business and transparency in global supply chains. Despite the significant economic and health challenges faced by the UK due to the global pandemic and, yes, the challenges we faced on the reduction of ODA, I assure noble Lords that we remain one of the leading aid donors. We also remain committed to using UK support and aid to help tackle modern slavery and human trafficking.

Many other countries within the Commonwealth are taking big steps: India, Australia, Canada, Nigeria, Malawi and Zambia, to name a few. I know that the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, will be interested specifically in the work that we are doing in these countries. Yet the global community, as many noble Lords recognised, is still not on track to meet the challenges in addressing this issue by 2030—and Covid-19 has not helped. We certainly adapted our £20 million global fund to end modern slavery to contribute to the humanitarian cause for garment factory workers and migrants in south-east Asia as Covid-19 hit. Let me also inform noble Lords that we provided a £250,000 grant to the Freedom Fund for its emergency relief. However, we must do well and I assure all noble Lords, including the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, and the right reverend Prelate that we continue to strengthen our work—not just as government to government or with businesses, but with charities, faith groups and civil society.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, among others, pointed to the ICAI report. We have accepted three recommendations fully and two others in part. We continue to work closely with ICAI in this respect. I take on board what the noble Lord, Lord Hogan-Howe, said about how we can look in-country. As the Covid-19 challenge lifts, I hope that through visits we will be able to look to in-country programmes, including those that he suggested with organisations such as the police, to see how we can strengthen internal mechanisms across the Commonwealth.

In the short time that he had, the noble Lord, Lord Collins, among others, including the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, and my noble friend Lord Randall made practical suggestions on the strengthening of supply chains. Yes, we have made announcements. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, asked a series of questions in this respect. If I may, I will revert to him in writing on the specifics, but work is under way through the FCDO and the Home Office on many of the questions that he raised.

We hope that the next Global Conference on Child Labour, to be held in South Africa in 2022, will be a further opportunity to unite Commonwealth countries, as CHOGM will be. This year, as many noble Lords will know, marks the UN International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, which provides yet another important opportunity.

I fear that I am one who has perhaps betrayed the clock by running some 30 seconds over my allocated time. However, given the strength and quality of the

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

practical insights provided by noble Lords, this will continue to be a focus for the Government, and an area that we will return to in future. Only by joining forces and working together will we be able to eradicate these crimes. We have heard about Wilberforce, but it was Kipling who urged us to

“fill the unforgiving minute

With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run”.

I believe today’s contributions have done that.

3.21 pm

Sitting suspended.

NHS: Staff Numbers after Covid-19

Question for Short Debate

3.38 pm

Asked by Lord Clark of Windermere

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what plans they have for the number of National Health Service staff after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): The time limit for this debate is one hour.

Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I count myself very fortunate to be introducing this Question. This is an invaluable parliamentary means whereby questions can be asked in a more discursive manner than usual and the Minister will listen and, we hope, provide answers. I shall make a couple of obvious general points.

The people of Britain love the NHS, as has been seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, but there were problems prior to the pandemic. I shall make three basic points to set the scene. The NHS is the fifth-largest employer in the world, yet we spend less on health as a percentage of our GDP than almost every other developed country in the world. To compound the situation domestically, there was a shortage of hospital beds prior to the pandemic. Indeed, we are bottom of the Euro league for intensive care beds, with 7.3 beds per 100,000 of population, compared with the best, Germany, with 33.8 beds—what a difference. Thus, prior to the previous cuts we were ill-prepared, and there have been too many cuts under the austerity measures of the early 21st century.

I am certain in my own mind that it was due only to the dedication, brilliance and sacrifice of NHS staff that we got through—and I mean all staff, from the top consultant to the most junior worker. And it has been at tremendous cost to many of them in stress, burnout and mental health challenges. We owe them a tremendous amount and I hope that, in his summing up, the Minister will confirm that this will be recognised when we have won the battle with Covid-19.

I will begin with nurses. Over the years, the Minister must have become tired of me pursuing him on the issue of nurses. I remain concerned. Currently, we are at least 40,000 nurses short. Over the next seven years we will face a shortfall of 108,000 nurses. I must ask

the Minister very bluntly: will HMG drastically increase the training of fully qualified nurses? What discussions has he had to ensure the provision of the educational means to do so?

The Royal College of Nursing has conducted surveys and expressed deep concern about the exodus of qualified staff following the pandemic. I share that concern. Will the Minister push ahead and prepare plans to deliver what is necessary to persuade staff that they are valued, and to retain them in the NHS? According to the RCN survey, 35% of nurses are contemplating leaving the profession within the year. Will HMG also provide the NHS with the means to fund occupational health and psychological support, and, if necessary, breaks beyond annual leave?

Nurses are due a pay rise. They are currently worse off than they were a decade ago. Will HMG ensure that the upcoming pay settlement is really meaningful and commensurate with the ever-rising skills of nurses?

I turn now to GPs. If we are to meet the demands and expectations of the general public, we will have to increase the number of doctors, especially GPs. Does the Minister accept that we are still suffering in the training of doctors from the austerity years, over which his party presided? In spite of the modest increases of late to close the gap, does he accept that we face a shortfall of 7,000 GPs in the next two years? As a starter, we need to double the number of medical school places from 7,500 to 15,000 by the end of the decade.

I will move on from numbers to talk about processes. I am concerned about the reluctance of younger practitioners to enter general practice in many parts of the country, leaving it often to only elderly GPs to carry on as single practitioners, supplemented by agencies and bank locums. Do the Government really feel that that is satisfactory and sustainable?

I have a personal problem with this in Windermere at the surgery I am registered with. It operates from a fine purpose-built building but has been without a permanent GP for a number of years. It functions largely due to the skill, experience, training and commitment of nurse practitioners and other staff with specialist skills. Their work is supplemented by local doctors—if they can be persuaded to come. Five years ago, the practice was leased to a private company, OneMedical Group, 80 miles away in Leeds. Last autumn it took advantage of a break clause in its lease and surrendered it, and we are back to square one; it is far from a satisfactory situation.

The key issue is that younger GPs do not wish to buy into practices which might involve hundreds of thousands of pounds. I know a number of practices in Cumbria have had to undertake severe reorganisation and mergers simply to survive. In a letter to the *Guardian* on 1 March, a GP who has worked in the NHS for over 30 years made the same point, that younger GPs will not buy in to practices. I ask the Minister the most critical question that I am asking today: is this model, requiring such large financial commitments by individuals, suitable to the 21st century? Would the department do a preliminary examination of this problem?

The pandemic has changed so much, and we were found wanting. The years of austerity caused serious damage to our NHS. Only because of the beliefs of our NHS staff are we getting through it. One thing is clear: there is increased demand on our health service. There will have to be much change, including permanently increasing spending. The Government will have to recognise that what may have worked in the past may not do so in future. Models which have been sacrosanct may need to be examined and, if necessary, changed. All this is essential, with a radical White Paper bringing health and social care together. I ask the Minister: are the Government up to it?

3.47 pm

Baroness Tyler of Enfield (LD) [V]: My Lords, the NHS workforce has been working flat out for a year now. Their dedication, professionalism and personal sacrifices have inspired the whole nation. Vacancies stood at over 100,000 before the pandemic. The NHS now faces a huge backlog of operations with an exhausted workforce and increasing levels of sickness absence. Moving forward, a fully funded workforce plan is critical and must take priority over reforms to NHS structures.

I recently spoke to two very senior nurses working in London ICUs, who told me that what they need more than anything was time off for recovery and additional nurses to provide pre-pandemic levels of patient care.

The recent report of the Public Services Committee, looking at the lessons of Covid-19, received compelling evidence that other European countries have considerably more critical care beds per head of population than we do. Does the Minister agree that, if the pandemic has taught us one thing, it is the need to adopt the rainy day principle and build spare capacity in for future crises?

3.48 pm

Lord Patel (CB) [V]: My Lords, I recognise that the Government want to address the issue of the NHS clinical workforce. The problem is not the ambition, but in having a clear long-term strategy to achieve this. Does the Minister agree that previous attempts have failed? The intensity and stressful nature of the work related to Covid and other factors, such as the recently announced pension cap, may make retaining staff difficult?

Recent surveys by the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Physicians, the British Medical Association and many others have shown a very high proportion of the workforce are unhappy about their work, with low morale and mental health issues particularly related to Covid. With advances in care, NHS England is likely to require a growth in workforce of 3.2% per year over the next 15 years. That is nearly 650,000 full-time equivalent staff over the next decade. There are also issues about managing the workforce. I hope that through the new NHS Bill we can explore a long-term solution through legislation. Maybe the Minister would welcome that.

3.50 pm

The Lord Bishop of Carlisle [V]: My Lords, I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Clark of Windermere, for securing this short but important debate. It is

always a pleasure and a privilege to follow the noble Lord, Lord Patel. I do not intend to repeat all the alarming statistics since it is abundantly clear that we are facing a crisis in the NHS workforce that is likely to get worse post Covid and which requires a co-ordinated long-term strategy. The numbers speak for themselves.

Our debate today is not just about the recruitment and retention of front-line NHS and social care staff. It also raises the issue of an ever-growing demand that drives the need for a larger workforce. There are, of course, many reasons for that, not least long lives and multiple morbidities, but alongside those go questions about lifestyle, behaviours and personal responsibility. The recent White Paper *Integration and Innovation* emphasises the importance of public health. What plans might Her Majesty's Government have for making prevention a key part of their strategy for workforce development?

3.51 pm

Baroness Wyld (Con): My Lords, with my minute I would like to highlight specifically those involved in treating perinatal mental illness. As many as one in five women experience mental health difficulties during pregnancy or after childbirth. The NHS long-term plan addressed that and workforce numbers are starting to move in the right direction, although we are playing catch-up in what has been a long neglected area.

The pandemic has resulted in women missing out on vital face-to-face interactions with health workers and support groups, so it is not surprising that during my research I found that many health professionals fear an epidemic of post-natal depression in particular. I would like my noble friend to ensure that his department reviews this, recognising that it is about not just workforce numbers but adequate training to spot early signs and to give women the personalised understanding that they need. Sadly, some women may not have felt able to speak up during the pandemic, so we do not know what the long-term effects will be on the demand for services, and I urge the Government to keep that at the forefront of their mind in their workforce planning.

3.52 pm

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interest as a member of the GMC board. The NHS has responded magnificently to Covid but its underlying problems still exist. As the Health Foundation's Jennifer Dixon put it, the NHS is under-resourced, under-doctored and under-nursed. The foundation forecasts that by 2033-4, vacancies will exceed 475,000 full-time equivalent, and even more will be needed to meet rising expectations and the impact of a growing older population. Yesterday's Budget revealed a cut in spending for the Minister's department of £30 billion from April and social care reform has once again been kicked into the long grass, so where is the long-term approach to the NHS and social care? Where is the long-term approach to workforce planning that is so desperately needed? Where is the innovation?

The GMC has used emergency powers to grant registration to over 25,000 doctors so that they can support the pandemic response, but most of them

[LORD HUNT OF KINGS HEATH]
have still not been deployed. What a missed opportunity to bring those doctors back permanently to alleviate our workforce shortages.

3.54 pm

Baroness Jolly (LD) [V]: My Lords, the NHS is critically short of staff so it is a credit to all that over the pandemic the amount of care given increased by one-third with the total workforce short by 84,000. The scale and complexity of care have risen considerably over the last few years, and I trust that the NHS pay review body will take all this into consideration.

Our Chief Nursing Officer has £28 million to recruit internationally nurses and midwives who are keen to join the NHS front line. The global market has widened for the ethical recruitment of health and care staff by aligning with the WHO code of practice. How many overseas nurses does the CNO hope to recruit? The forthcoming health and care Bill, which I hope is innovative, puts a duty on the Secretary of State to report on workforce planning responsibilities, which would be an ideal opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny. Maybe then we can revisit the issue.

3.55 pm

Baroness Greengross (CB) [V]: My Lords, the All-Party Group on Adult Social Care—[*Inaudible.*]

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): We are having difficulty hearing the noble Baroness. We will come back to her after the next speaker, the noble Lord, Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

3.56 pm

Lord Willis of Knaresborough (LD) [V]: My Lords, I will make a very brief reference to a group of NHS staff who have gone largely unnoticed during this pandemic and the debate but have been trailblazers and lifesavers in equal measure. I refer to the newest recruits in the registered healthcare workforce, nursing associates. The nursing associate register commenced two years ago, and today there are 4,036 registrants with a further 7,000 who commenced training at the height of the pandemic. Many plan to train on as registered nurses. These remarkable people, most of whom were dedicated care assistants, have risen to the greatest nursing challenge ever seen, saving patients and, indeed, the NHS. What steps are the Government taking to recognise the contribution of nursing associates and to redouble the investment in the recruitment and training of future cohorts?

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): I will move to the next speaker, the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann. We hope by the end of her speech to have resolved Baroness Greengross's communication issue.

3.57 pm

Baroness Altmann (Con): My Lords, I am pleased to see that the numbers applying for nursing have been increasing. I know that the Government have started on their task of recruiting 50,000 more nurses by the end of this Parliament. What progress has there been

towards that target? More crucially, what is the plan for improving retention rates in the NHS, as well as recruitment? Is there any further plan for improving recruitment and retention in the social care sector, which has not been mentioned so far?

I know that there is also a potentially significant issue with GP shortages being caused by early retirement, which has been encouraged by pension rules. Is there a plan to look into that issue as well?

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): I call the noble Lord, Lord Green of Deddington.

3.58 pm

Lord Green of Deddington (CB) [V]: My Lords, as the noble Lord, Lord Clark, outlined, we have for years failed to train the medical staff we need. To take doctors, for example, the numbers are astonishing: over one-third of our doctors—35%—obtained their qualifications overseas, yet in both France and Germany the figure is below 10%. Meanwhile, some 8,000 British applicants are being turned away every year.

The figures for nursing are even worse. Until 2016, more than 30,000 UK applicants were turned away every year, while tens of thousands of nurses were recruited from abroad, often from countries that need them far more than we do.

Finally, the Covid crisis is an opportunity for a major reform of medical training. I certainly hope the Government will take it. The NHS's standing has never been higher and the number of volunteers has never been greater. We need some firm action. Our young people deserve these opportunities. I look forward to the Minister's response.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): I now call the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross.

4 pm

Baroness Greengross (CB) [V]: My Lords, I am co-chair of the All-Party Group on Adult Social Care. Our recent report found that the government target of recruiting 20,000 additional social care workers was not enough—[*Inaudible.*]

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Watkins of Tavistock) (CB): I am sorry; I think the difficulty is that the noble Baroness is not close enough to her microphone. When she was tested, it was fine. If we cannot hear her again, perhaps she could write and the Minister will pick up the issues she would like to raise? I will give the noble Baroness one more try right now.

I am sorry; our connection is just too poor for us to hear the noble Baroness. If she could send an email in, the Minister will pick up the issues when he sums up. I thank her very much for her patience.

I call the noble Lord, Lord Winston. No, the noble Lord has withdrawn. I call the noble Lord, Lord Balfe. No, he has withdrawn too. I call the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett of Manor Castle.

4.02 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP) [V]: My Lords, I am indeed here. I have one minute and two points. First, on recruitment and training, the World Health Organization reports that there are 28 million nurses worldwide but a 5.9 million global shortfall in the number of nurses needed. One in every eight nurses practises in a country other than the one where they were born or trained. The UK is a wealthy country and is traditionally a large importer of this scarce and valuable human resource, which other speakers have referred to. Surely we should be training sufficient numbers of nurses for our own needs and more. I note recent figures that UCAS has received 48,830 applications for nursing courses in England, up from 35,960 at the same point last year. In the continuing emergency situation, will the Government ensure that everyone who wants to study nursing gets a place, and will they agree to the Royal College of Physicians' request to double the number of medical school places?

Secondly, on retention, for which one requirement is surely decent pay, there are many reasons to give the NHS a pay rise that I hardly need to list. However, I note that research by independent analysts London Economics found that 81% of the cost of an NHS pay rise would be recouped by the Government through additional taxes paid by the employee and employer, taxes earned through the greater economic activity that the pay rise would generate, and higher loan repayments by recent graduates. So why not a pay rise?

4.03 pm

Lord Jones (Lab) [V]: I offer tribute to our local NHS staff, those hard-pressed, weary, dedicated, resourceful, very local nurses and GPs and ever-courteous volunteers aplenty. They, the nurses, have injected tens of thousands so very professionally. Daily, we queued in our hundreds at the Deeside Leisure Centre. We sought immunity and we got it—the heroic nurses gave it. The nurse and the gatekeeper GP are the backbone of the NHS. We need more of them, urgently, and let us reward the heroic nurses better.

4.04 pm

Lord Horam (Con): My Lords, I was appalled to read last week that the Government now say that recruiters for the NHS and care homes can actively target 105 countries that were previously blacklisted on ethical grounds. These countries include Zimbabwe, Jamaica, South Africa and India, all of which have an acute shortage of doctors and nurses. India, for example, has 0.8 doctors per 1,000 people—the UK has 2.8 per 1,000 people. It is therefore ludicrous for the Government to say that recruitment from these countries has suddenly become ethical. It has not.

We need a proper workforce strategy. As a result of Covid and the great work of existing NHS staff, wherever they come from, there is real enthusiasm among young British people to work for the NHS—applications for nursing courses, for example, were up by 35% last year—yet medical school places increased by a paltry 500 in the last year for which I have figures. There is a double betrayal here: of those in poorer countries whose doctors and nurses we are stealing, and of the unemployed in this country who we are failing to train. It is shameful.

4.06 pm

Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]: My Lords, the Government must tackle the long-term underlying problems of training clinical and associated healthcare staff in a sustained and future-proofed way. We had serious gaps in capacity long before the Covid pandemic.

During Covid, exhausted and stretched staff have doubled, or even tripled, ward capacity in a makeshift manner to save lives over the past year. We must be better prepared for the future. Will the Minister commit to increase funding for the workforce development budget and internal education? We need a flexible, nurtured, resilient workforce to face the health challenges of tomorrow and incentives to retain our excellent NHS heroes.

These issues were urgent prior to the pandemic, and this has been a contributing factor to the appalling death toll in this country. The Government must make fully funded workforce planning a central aspect of any upcoming reforms.

4.07 pm

Baroness Thornton (Lab): I congratulate my noble friend Lord Clark on this debate. He is such a great champion of nurses; they could not have a better one. I also echo the request by the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett. Why not have a pay rise for nurses, paramedics and other NHS staff? It is a bit of a slap in the face not to have one.

At least 230 NHS staff have died during the pandemic, while thousands have been on long-term sick leave as a result of working on the front line. The Government have often cited their success in recruiting new nurses, saying that record numbers are working in the profession. However, the number of unfilled nursing posts in the NHS has barely changed. Can the Minister explain why there is not a publicly available, fully funded, long-term workforce plan for the NHS and social care to boost the numbers of nurses and NHS staff? I am sure that he would agree that the workforce remains key to the next phase of dealing with the pandemic and its aftermath.

4.08 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con): My Lords, I am hugely grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Clark of Windermere, for securing this very important debate and I pay tribute to his campaign on this subject. I also thank all noble Lords who have spoken so well in such a short amount of time. There is clearly widespread agreement that building a resilient NHS workforce to meet the future needs of this nation is essential, and I completely agree.

I also echo the thanks of the noble Lord, Lord Clark, for the extraordinary contributions of health and care workers across the UK during the pandemic. It is important that we recognise their extraordinary efforts. With the exceptional success in the UK of the rollout of the vaccines programme, we are at last approaching a time when the worst of the pandemic is over and the NHS can return to its business as usual—caring for the nation and providing world-leading healthcare.

[LORD BETHELL]

I will say a word about the long-term plan. A £3 billion, one-year package has been announced for 2021-22 as part of the spending review to support the NHS in tackling the impact of Covid-19. This will include £1 billion to address backlogs and tackle the long waiting lists raised by noble Lords, by facilitating up to a million extra checks, scans and additional operations.

As the NHS gets to grips with the backlog of care, it is essential that we continue to change the way we deliver healthcare over the next 10 years. All those who spoke about innovation are absolutely right in that regard. We have a road map to do just this in the NHS long-term plan, which clearly sets out a new service model for the 21st century: more care delivered in the community, digitally enabled primary and outpatient care, and a relentless focus on the health of the local population and reducing health inequalities. I reassure the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Carlisle that the plan absolutely identifies how we can make better use of early diagnosis and technology potentially to improve preventive care, population health and patient care. This will be supported by new and integrated models of care, as laid out in the NHS Bill.

I shall say a few words about staff retention. To do these things, we need more staff, yes, but critically we need to hold on to those that we already have for longer, help them to recover from the herculean efforts of the pandemic, nurture their skills and enable them to provide the care to patients that drives their efforts. The commitment of staff and the wider impacts of the pandemic mean that the NHS continues to see much stronger retention rates.

Despite that, troubling issues need to be addressed to ensure that dedicated NHS staff have the best possible experience of work. The noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, made an absolutely fair point on the need for a holiday. Our black and minority ethnic staff, in particular, report some of the poorest workplace experiences. I remind the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, that the NHS people plan sets out exactly the kind of programme that she called for to tackle these issues, and we will continue to strive every day to ensure improvement on that front.

I come to NHS workforce growth and planning. The workforce has increased by over 160,000 already since 2010, an increase of 16%. This growth continues to be a key focus to ensure that we meet the rise in demand for health and care services. The 2020 spending review provided £260 million to continue to grow the NHS workforce and support commitments made in the NHS long-term plan. Nursing is absolutely the most critical component in this vision. I am pleased to report to the noble Lord, Lord Clark, that we are on track to deliver 50,000 more nurses by the end of this Parliament and put the NHS on a trajectory to a sustainable long-term supply in future. The 50,000 commitment is underpinned by a robust delivery programme, which will be achieved through increased domestic and international recruitment, and improved retention. The latest NHS workforce statistics show that nurse numbers have increased by almost 10,600 from almost 289,200 to over 299,700 between December 2019 and December 2020.

To reassure the noble Lord, Lord Clark, and echo the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, the future domestic pipeline is strong, with UCAS end-of-cycle data showing 25,000 student nurses enrolled on courses in 2020-21. This is a 27% increase. I must say to the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, that we cannot give everyone a place. As I am sure she knows, the job is highly skilled; it is a very difficult vocation, and it is extremely hard work. Not everyone is suited to it. More recent UCAS data shows unique applicants to nursing and midwifery courses in 2021 have increased dramatically to 48,300, or by 34% compared with last year. I hope that that provides some reassurance to my noble friend Lady Wyld.

On primary care, we are equally committed to growing the workforce and expanding the number of appointments available to patients. This will mean improved access to GP services and bigger teams of staff. On the reservations expressed by the noble Lord, Lord Clark, on the GP model, we are completely open to change: we have already looked very carefully at the independent review partnership model, the GP fellowship scheme and other schemes for GPs. But, with record numbers of GPs being recruited at the moment, it is too early to call time on the successful existing model. We have committed at least an additional £1.5 billion in cash terms for general practice over the next four years for additional staff. We will grow the workforce by 6,000 more doctors and 26,000 more primary care professionals. As of December 2020, there were 438 more full-time equivalent doctors compared with a year before.

Education was raised by many noble Lords. The Government have funded an extra 1,500 undergraduate medical school places per year in England—a rise of 25%. I reassure the noble Lords, Lord Willis and Lord Green, that the number of medical school training places will rise to 7,500 each year. We have also delivered five brand-new medical schools: in Sunderland, Lancashire, Chelmsford, Lincoln and Canterbury.

My noble friend Lady Wyld made extremely good points on the importance of perinatal care—a subject in which we share a keen interest.

UCAS data shows that there has been a large increase in the number of applicants to study medicine this year, with almost 5,000 additional applicants compared with 2020.

International recruitment was raised by a number of noble Lords. There is excellent growth in our domestic workforce, but we do still value the workers from all over the world who are playing a leading role in the NHS's efforts to tackle coronavirus and save lives. We have made £80 million available for the recruitment of overseas nurses and the recruitment of healthcare support workers. Trusts are working hard to fill these nursing positions.

To the noble Lord, Lord Jones, I say that there is nothing ethical about blacklisting healthcare staff from certain countries.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, I say that I do not have the precise number to hand, and I suspect that it is not in the public realm, but I will try to find it and send a note to her. Perhaps I can reassure her that the supply of international nurses wanting to

work in the NHS remains strong and, in spite of travel bans in some places, we are seeing more nurses arrive all the time. We have recently published our code of practice for the international recruitment of healthcare professionals, which will ensure that the UK is a world leader in ethical international recruitment and will, I hope, go some way to reassure the noble Lord, Lord Jones.

I reassure my noble friend Lady Altmann that we are also doing more to attract people into social care. We ran a national recruitment campaign across broadcast, digital and social media. The latest phase in the campaign was launched in early February, highlighting the vital role that the social care workforce has played during the pandemic.

On pay, while most pay rises will be paused in the rest of the public sector for 2021-22, the Government recognise, as does the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, the uniquely challenging impact of Covid-19 on the NHS, so we will continue to provide pay rises for NHS workers, including nurses. For recommendations on pay we are looking to the independent pay review body and will carefully consider its recommendations when we receive them.

A number of noble Lords touched on staff coming back from retirement, which has been raised in previous debates. The noble Lord, Lord Hunt, raised this point. I acknowledge that former healthcare professionals came forward in extraordinary numbers to support the NHS during Covid-19, and we are enormously grateful for their response. Due to the postponement of elective care, the skills and experience of many of these professionals were not deployed at the time—the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, was entirely right to make that point. We need to understand the reasons for that more clearly and to learn lessons for the future—I acknowledge that. In many areas, hospitals preferred to make more use of their existing staff rather than take on unfamiliar staff in a time of pressure, where teams were dependent on trusting relationships to manage the crisis. In future we need to ensure established ongoing relationships at local level, so that when the need comes again—as I am sure it will—this invaluable and public-spirited resource can be quickly deployed to ease pressures.

I am confident that there is the potential to build a permanent legacy through the development of a form of NHS and care reserve, which could help former healthcare professionals remain part of the NHS family, keep their skills up to date and provide additional support in times of pressure. NHS England has been piloting models for an NHS reserve across the regions of England. NHSEI has established seven pilots, one in each region of England. It is drawing on the learning from these pilot sites, the experience of the Bring Back Staff programme and five subject-specific national framework task and finish groups to investigate the best way forward to make additional flexible workforce resources available to the NHS.

I finish by reassuring noble Lords that growing and supporting the NHS workforce is a key priority for this Government. The breadth of our work, which I have only touched on today, should be a testament to the Government's focus on this essential mission.

4.19 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

4.41 pm

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Lord Lexden) (Con): My Lords, the hybrid Grand Committee will now resume. The next business is a Question for Short Debate on the steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to support hauliers transporting goods internationally. The time limit is one hour. I call the noble Lord, Lord Taylor of Holbeach. I believe he is on the call, but perhaps he is having problems unmuting himself. We shall adjourn for five minutes so that the technical problem can be overcome.

4.42 pm

Sitting suspended.

Hauliers

Question for Short Debate

4.47 pm

Asked by Lord Taylor of Holbeach

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support hauliers transporting goods internationally.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Lord Lexden): My Lords, let us endeavour to return to the start of the debate. I call the noble Lord, Lord Taylor of Holbeach, to ask his Question.

Lord Taylor of Holbeach (Con) [V]: I thank the noble Lord, the Deputy Chair of Committees, for calling me. I have been here, but we were out of contact.

I thank the Minister for taking this short debate. She is rightly highly regarded and respected in this House. Much of what I say will be the responsibility of other government departments; their inter-relationship with haulage and overseas trade is complex. I look forward to her response. She will know that I have been encouraged by the digital engagement team to participate in the pilot, using this debate to demonstrate the range of knowledge which is represented by Members of this House. They have asked those working in the industry likely to be interested of their take on the debate. I will refer to some of them later.

I begin by declaring my interests in the register. Noble Lords will understand that I will draw on my horticultural experience, as the business is very much involved with trade in the Netherlands and elsewhere and in both parts of Ireland. It could be said that the situation is much improved since 10 weeks ago, when the Kent variant of Covid-19 first appeared and France unilaterally denied access to road transport. Dover ferries and the tunnel were unable to function. This ended when the Government negotiated a resumption of traffic by a Covid-testing scheme for drivers which

[LORD TAYLOR OF HOLBEACH]
over the Christmas holiday relieved the stack. The dress rehearsals which had been held earlier in the year for a no-deal stalemate proved their worth, and the department is to be congratulated on the smooth running of what could have been a chaotic situation.

It was also demonstrated how our overseas trading links and full supermarket shelves depend on our road hauliers. I believe a remote customs and inspection facility has been constructed to relieve pressure on Dover. Will my noble friend tell me how well it is functioning and whether other such remote facilities likely to be constructed in connection with the newly announced freeports?

There are a number of remote border control posts. There is one at FreshLinc, Spalding, and we ourselves are a place of destination. Does my noble friend have some figures on how many of these are registered? Noble Lords may be surprised that they are considered necessary. However, although we have a trade and co-operation agreement with the European Union, negotiated so ably by my noble friend Lord Frost, who will be making his maiden speech in the next debate, we are now a third country and some elements of traffic are subject to not just customs declarations but product inspections. Frictionless this is not.

I can give noble Lords a personal example. Because of our new relationship, our business is subject to UK phytosanitary certification inspection regulations, as our biosecurity has been repatriated. I welcomed these regulations when they came before the Grand Committee in December. However, they are complex and introduce a great deal of friction into trade. Noble Lords will probably not be aware of the considerable paperwork in the export and import of plants and flowers, and, for that matter, meat products. New computer programs are being designed by Defra's Animal and Plant Health Agency. Meanwhile, we have had to use an old program. Although there is some easing of pressure, paperwork and inspections are still the order of the day.

One of the respondents to the digital team's survey, Mike from the West Midlands, called for "Less complex requirements for customs procedures, and make it all online—less paperwork". I agree. Can my noble friend the Minister update the Grand Committee as to when traders can expect the arrival of this updated platform, and what sort of transfer arrangements will be made for change? Is the Department for Transport in discussion with colleagues in government on the design of digital systems, with the intention of making trade as straightforward for hauliers and traders as possible? I know that two staff members at Taylor's have been invited to meetings. Perhaps I might say that I view traders and hauliers as having the same interest in this regard. Easing friction and limiting costs is very much in everyone's interests. The Government have done much to assist the push-pull of trade across borders with TSS—the trader support service. These are free to use but not without costs to the trader in collecting and inputting data. It is the sort of partnership which a Government supporting trade and commerce need to provide. In addition to encouraging trade support services, what other support can be put in place to support hauliers transporting goods internationally?

I mentioned previously the cost to traders of the regulating procedures involved. This becomes even more of a problem when groupage or part-loads only are involved. I was told of a nurseryman who had to pay additional costs of £250 for one trolley of plug plants from Belgium for growing on at his nursery. Parcels traffic, which used to keep retailers stocked, can be even more disproportionate; parcel companies can be excused for not providing this service for products subject to phytosanitary regulation. What efforts are the department making to reduce the friction on such businesses to markets which were freely accessible within the EU pre-Brexit, regrettably with Northern Ireland now included?

Easing friction is in everyone's interest. I am grateful to Logistics UK, formerly the FTA, for its briefing which reinforces this maxim. I hope all noble Lords participating in this debate have received it. I have sent a copy to my noble friend the Minister. It presents a number of ideas, particularly to address the difficulties for deliveries to Northern Ireland, which are less certain following the recent decision not to develop port inspection facilities.

The grace period ends on 1 April and noble Lords will be aware of today's news on this. Those of us in food and non-food agriculture and horticultural produce need a viable groupage provision for hauliers to offer traders. Our season top-up business to garden centres needs a parcel service. With the will, we can improve systems and structures. Logistics UK also made a similar request for advice on additional EU trade requirements from April that I endorse.

Haulage of all types has been impacted by the pandemic. How is traffic? I ask my noble friend the Minister what the latest figures are compared with the first two months of 2020? What are the Minister's views on this? What measures in particular will help the industry recover now we have a road map?

Several correspondents to the digital engagement team of the House commented on this. Noble Lords will not be surprised that I received a number of submissions from groups representing performing arts and music about the particular challenges of touring not only in the EU, but even ATA Carnets and CITES in Northern Ireland. The hauliers involved are anxious at what they see as unworkable cost trade and cabotage restrictions.

I hope I have been able in framing this QSD to indicate the importance of the link that international haulage provides for our arts, trade and commerce. I thank noble Lords for their interest in this QSD. I look forward to the speeches that follow and to the response of my noble friend.

4.57 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, has spelled out the problems. The reason they have not been as apparent as they might is not just the Covid effect, but as the period of grace means that the regulations have not been fully implemented either across the channel or in Northern Ireland.

My main point is a different one. Once we return to something like pre-existing levels of exports and imports, there will be a serious problem of a lack of skilled HGV drivers. A disproportionate number of HGV

drivers from and to the UK, whether employed, subcontracted or owner-drivers, have been EU citizens, mainly from central and eastern Europe. A lot of small EU firms also operate over here. The British-based driving workforce is ageing.

Brexit has meant thousands of haulage drivers who are EU citizens leaving the UK and small EU-owned hauliers are also pulling out. Part of the post-Brexit plan for road haulage has to be an upgraded workforce. We need a systematic training and upskilling system and recruitment of a new generation of drivers. I see no plan for that, either by Government or by the industry. In her reply, can the Minister please enlighten the Committee on what is the strategy for upgrading the UK road haulage workforce?

4.59 pm

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, the guidance to hauliers on the government website about the trade and co-operation agreement requirements amounts to 37 pages—some little light reading.

Ian Wright, CEO of the Food and Drink Federation, told the Commons Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU that

“we now have to treat every different bit of a consignment and every different product with the same approach that we might have previously done to whole lorryloads ... we are going to see the re-engineering of almost all ... supply chains over the next six to nine months.”

The difficulties of Brexit red tape result from the choice made by this Government for a very hard Brexit. By prioritising sovereignty over market access, they were determined to leave the single market and customs union. The only real hope is to change that situation in the years ahead. Now there is a unilateral move by the Government to change the provisions of the Northern Ireland protocol. This foolish and regrettably confrontational move has surely prejudiced hopes for negotiated easements of the protocol or the TCA, unless the Minister can assure me that that is not the case.

5 pm

Baroness Coussins (CB): My Lords, reports last November said that one reason for incoming lorries being stuck at Dover was that drivers from Lithuania, Hungary, Romania and elsewhere could not understand the customs forms, as they were only in English. The Minister told me in a Written Answer that the DfT road haulage handbook was being translated into 13 other languages, starting with Welsh, Polish and Romanian. Are the other 10 translations now complete and available? Other DfT measures include the multilingual incident reporting line. Have all these initiatives had the intended effect and eased the logjam attributable to language barriers?

An answer I had from the Treasury sadly did not reveal the same foresight: customs declarations are available in only English and Welsh, with no plans for translated or bilingual versions. Will the Minister speak to Treasury colleagues to see whether best practice by her department might be copied there too?

5.01 pm

Earl Attlee (Con) [V]: My Lords, I am getting reports that the French roaming permits system for abnormal loads is not available to UK hauliers, which

is causing obvious difficulties. Can the Minister give us an update, and perhaps take into account the possibility of amending the special types rules so that the special types general order is available only to operators with a UK operator's licence? On the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, perhaps it would help if we improved the conditions of employment and in particular rest facilities for lorry drivers.

5.02 pm

Lord Dodds of Duncairn (DUP) [V]: My Lords, today the department of agriculture in Northern Ireland said that the number of regulatory checks required by the bizarre and unnecessary Northern Ireland protocol equates to 20% of all similar checks across the entire European Union. That is more checks in Northern Ireland than are carried out by any single EU member state, even the biggest. Think about that; it is an absolutely horrendous situation, and that is with the grace periods still in force. If they end, as the EU and anti-Northern Ireland interests start demanding, then each of the 1,350 retail lorries arriving in Northern Ireland per week, which at present require a single declaration, will require 20,000 to 30,000 between them. That is absolutely unacceptable—it is nearly the same amount as for the entire EU, and it would be for the internal UK movements of lorries delivering from and to the UK. We need to get real here. I welcome the action by the Government yesterday, but it is not a permanent solution. Can the Government ensure that this scandalous situation is addressed very quickly for the long term?

5.03 pm

Lord Snape (Lab): My Lords, I am less concerned with the supposed delays to heavy goods vehicles crossing the channel and more concerned to see that the Government meet their carbon reduction targets in 2050. Some one-fifth of total carbon emissions in this country come from road vehicles, 21% of which come from heavy goods vehicles. Yet in 2019, the last year for which I have figures, no fewer than 1.6 million lorries were carried through the Channel Tunnel by Getlink, and 2.5 million lorries took the short sea crossing.

I have always been in favour of the Channel Tunnel. Back in the 1980s, I was chairman of the Channel Tunnel All-Party Group. I was at Canterbury when President Mitterrand and Mrs Thatcher signed the treaty of that name. We were told then that the opportunities for long-distance rail freight would be enormous, once the Channel Tunnel was opened. Yet, traffic by rail never exceeded more than 2,000 tonnes, and that number is falling. Given that the channel crossing is overdependent on road haulage, can the Minister tell us whether she is confident of meeting the government targets for carbon emissions?

5.05 pm

Lord Bradshaw (LD) [V]: My Lords, the international logistics industry is very complex, competitive and efficient. The trade and co-operation agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom does not make provision for the industry's very time-sensitive

[LORD BRADSHAW]
arrangements, which are expensive and, almost inevitably, take up time. Can the Minister tell the Committee whose advice was sought in drawing up the agreements? Did they have intimate knowledge of how the logistics industry works? It seems as if many issues were swept under the carpet with scant regard for the effects on commerce. Reference was made by the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, to an FTA circular. I certainly have not seen it and it has not been widely circulated because the FTA does not communicate with the general body of opinion.

5.06 pm

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, on spotting the need for these critical issues to be aired and responded to by the Government. I wonder whether the Minister would be minded to bundle her responses to noble Lords' questions into a single note. It would be helpful if all the points raised could be addressed in a single place and distributed to all those taking part in this important debate.

I have three questions to add to those posed by others. Do the Government believe that serious problems exist? If so, what are the options for solving them, or does the Minister anticipate that they will continue?

5.07 pm

Lord Empey (UUP) [V]: My Lords, in opening this debate, the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, said that easing friction is in everybody's interests. I believe that everybody in this Committee would agree with that. However, as other speakers have said, we have exacerbated friction between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, almost to the point at which it is utterly ridiculous. A small piece of earth on the tyre of a vehicle can cause it to be prevented from entering Northern Ireland because it is contaminated with soil from Great Britain.

Groupage issues will be a nightmare for hauliers because, as everybody knows, people build up loads and try to ensure that they can be delivered in small parcels to different people. The paperwork for a pallet on a groupage lorry will be dramatic. Even the Irish Republic is suffering. It can send lorries directly to Europe without crossing Great Britain, but it costs between €600 and €800 extra per lorry. This results in hugely increased costs and empty lorries coming back. It is unacceptable.

5.08 pm

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con) [V]: My Lords, this debate can best be described as delays caused for want of data. Does the Minister agree that this is a question of data not wagons? Where is the data? When can we reasonably expect it and how can it be effectively deployed to take out the delays in the system? Has she had a chance to look at the paper on reducing friction in international trade that I published last year and which is part of the *2025 UK Border Strategy* on page 40?

Does she agree that we in the United Kingdom have an excellent opportunity to create a utility trade platform that not only would reduce delayed costs but could be

commercially beneficial? It could be sent right around the world for the benefit of every member of the United Kingdom.

Turning to musicians, this is a huge problem, but what is the solution? We need a solution, so we need to have those discussions with our European partners. Finally, I commend all the efforts of Elton John towards unblocking the problem with musicians. We all need to become "Rocket People".

5.10 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab) [V]: My Lords, all the speakers in this excellent debate have identified real problems that I suggest could have been thought about four years ago when we had the first Brexit vote. They can all possibly be solved, but it will take time, and at the moment it is a complete disaster. What have the Government learned from these issues and how will they change the procedures, documentation et cetera? More importantly, how do they intend that these improvements will be communicated to the industry? How will they work when we have the extra lines of problems coming in on 1 April and 1 July? Lastly, what consultation has taken place with the equivalent people in the European Union—or is it just us working on our own?

5.11 pm

Lord Foster of Bath (LD) [V]: My Lords, much concern has been expressed about the post-Brexit problems faced by creative groups such as orchestras and theatre companies wishing to tour in Europe. In addition to the problems around work permits and other paperwork requirements, they also face, as the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, mentioned, transport problems. Prior to Brexit, such groups often visited several venues in multiple countries, with their own or rented specialist vehicles moving their instruments and equipment from venue to venue. But under the post-Brexit cabotage rules, this will no longer be possible unless UK creative groups stop using UK vehicles and rely on EU ones.

When, in January, I raised this with the Culture Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Barran, assured me that colleagues in the Department for Transport were working hard to address these issues. So can the Minister tell us what has been achieved in the intervening time? Surely we should at least be able to get an exemption in cases such as this, where what leaves the UK in a lorry returns to the UK in the same lorry. Can she also tell us whether we should be additionally concerned now that the EU has shelved plans to ratify the trade deal with us because it no longer trusts us?

5.13 pm

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB) [V]: For Irish Sea freight, extending the grace period makes sense—but not unilaterally; not by resiling from due process and the protocol. Breaking our word is not what Britain does—or used not to be.

On the wider problems hauliers face, I see no quick fix, because they stem directly from ditching 60 years of market-opening endeavour. At a stroke, we have gone back not just to before the Thatcher single market

success, or Mr Heath's customs union, but back before the Macmillan Government invented EFTA successfully. How astonished they would be to see their party now put autarchy over access and opt for frontiers over freedom. It has consequences. In the decade after rejecting the EEA, Switzerland grew more slowly than every EU member state. In yesterday's Budget Red Book, we saw that our exports are forecast still to be shrinking in 2025. I fear that the hauliers are only the harbingers.

5.14 pm

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, traders and hauliers moving goods from GB to Northern Ireland urgently require certainty, stability and simplicity, which can be resolved or solved only through intergovernmental agreement and co-operation between the UK and the EU—not, as we witnessed last night, the unilateral actions of the Government, which simply fuel discontent. In this regard, I urge the Minister to provide an update to the House on the retail movement scheme, the groupage scheme, parcel delivery services and a bolted-on scheme for the trader support service for SPS food products as a matter of urgency. Also, will she indicate when discussions will resume between the UK and the EU, which are urgently required?

5.15 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, I entirely support the comments of my noble friend Lord Taylor of Holbeach and I refer to the fact that I am an honorary president of the United Kingdom Warehousing Association.

There remains great confusion in the paperwork required before a lorry leaves the UK for EU ports, and sometimes Northern Ireland too. The Government must give clearer advice. Can my noble friend the Minister say when digitalised forms will be available? As regards the issue that my noble friend Lord Taylor set out concerning groupage, it is unacceptable that even the smallest mistake involving only one item in the consignment means that the whole consignment will be lost. This must be addressed urgently.

I received a letter today from my noble friend Lady Scott of Bybrook. She says:

“We recognise the need to provide as much support for the haulage sector as possible.”

I ask the Minister: what is that support?

5.16 pm

Lord Strasburger (LD) [V]: My Lords, a highly successful sector of the UK haulage industry specialises in transporting staging, instruments and equipment around the UK and Europe for touring musicians. There are about eight major companies in this sector and they also work for dance companies, theatre, fashion, museums, and big events businesses. These British companies are pre-eminent in their field and it is estimated that they transport 80% of British and American bands on European tours.

However, the Government's failure to secure a cultural exemption from cabotage rules in the EU trade negotiations means that it is all going to hell in a handcart. Their trucks must now return to the UK

every two gigs in a tour of perhaps 25 venues, which is not remotely feasible. They are moving their businesses into the EU, at great cost to themselves and UK plc. How did the Government allow this catastrophe to happen and what are they going to do to save the industry?

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Lord Lexden) (Con): I call the noble Lord, Lord Bhatia. No? Then I call the noble Baroness, Lady Bull.

5.17 pm

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, I want to expand on the impact on international performance touring and I am grateful to One Dance UK for its briefing.

Theatre and dance companies work closely with hauliers, designing touring shows to fit into specific trucks. Drivers remain with the tour throughout, effectively becoming part of the crew and ensuring safe packing and movement of specialised materials, sets and equipment. Under the new cabotage rules, companies will now have to implement either a cross load to an EU supplier during the tour or bring an EU supplier to the UK to establish the back-and-begin touring pattern—which means four ferry crossings instead of two, extra mileage and more costs. As few tours complete in seven days and only go to two stops, the new rules will force UK companies to use EU rather than UK hauliers.

The ideal solution would be, as we have heard, a cultural exemption from cabotage for the movement of goods, especially where subject to a carnet, on the basis that the goods will not be sold but transported for touring use and then returned to the UK. This solution would also benefit EEA performing companies coming to the UK. Can the Minister commit to finding a solution that does not lead to further costs for UK performing companies or reductions in business for UK hauliers?

5.18 pm

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, I join with other noble Lords in pointing out that the issues on cabotage are part of a huge cloud now hanging over the creative sector, including the requirement for work permits or visa exemptions in many EU countries, CITES certificates for musical instruments, ATA carnets for all instruments and equipment, and proof of origin requirements for merchandise. Cabotage provisions in the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement will mean that performers' European tours will no longer be viable, because the agreement specifies that hauliers will be able to make only two journeys within a trip to the EU. Having to return to the UK between unloading sites in the EU will have a significant negative impact on the UK's cultural exports and associated jobs.

A successful UK transport industry dedicated to our creative industries is at risk of relocation to the EU, endangering British jobs and jeopardising the attractiveness of the UK as a culture hub, as support industries will follow the companies that relocate to the EU. What proposals do the Government have for a negotiated solution, such as they have heard about today, that will meet their needs?

5.20 pm

Lord Inglewood (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, my brief remarks are based on having spent 10 years in the European Parliament as a foot soldier in the creation of the single market. I was on the EU Goods Sub-Committee and am now chairman of the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership.

The point of the single market and the customs union is frictionless trade, which eases business and creates wealth. If you leave them, as we have done, it is an inevitable and direct consequence that grit gets in the engine, as we have already heard this afternoon from speaker after speaker. In reality, unlike almost all other sectors, the international road haulage industry cannot, for reasons of geography, exploit possible promised trading opportunities elsewhere around the globe. The sector is therefore inevitably collateral damage of Brexit. The Government have imposed that on the industry. What, if anything, do they propose to do both for the industry and, equally importantly, for its customers in the unhappy circumstances in which we currently find ourselves?

5.21 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB) [V]: My Lords, UK international haulage and trade has faced the most significant and sudden changes in 20 years after the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Hauliers and traders are starting to see the difference between adjustment issues and the new commercial and structural changes. As president of the CBI, I can say that we are seeing at first hand that business managing disruption has become the immediate priority. The changes at the GB/EU and GB/Northern Ireland borders have been the top priority: new customs processes, delays at ports, groupage, as we have heard, and inconsistent approaches from member states are just some of the challenges.

Meanwhile, firms face a new set of challenges due to the end of the grace periods and bridging mechanism timeframes. Does the Minister agree that these grace periods are not enough? Some are saying that we need at least two years. Does she believe that we should negotiate in good faith with the European Union to extend the grace periods to up to two years? Trade is essential if we are to build a competitive, dynamic and modern economy. This year—2021—is a golden opportunity for the UK to redefine its place in the world, showcase leadership and promote our values with the chairing of the G7 and hosting the UN COP 26 summit.

5.22 pm

Baroness Randerson (LD) [V]: My Lords, the Minister will undoubtedly defend the Government's record but, as a haulier said to me this week, no amount of flannel really fools anyone. Post pandemic, the UK needs an economy firing on all cylinders, not a Government who have deliberately and knowingly created major additional hurdles. The number of empty lorries returning to the EU with no British goods on board is now around 45%. Hauliers say that this figure is usually far lower—around 15% to 20%. In April, additional checks will add problems.

Trade through Welsh ports, meanwhile, is being replaced by direct ferries from Ireland to continental Europe. A competent Government would have adapted

to the circumstances and negotiated to extend the Brexit deadline until we start to recover from Covid. Instead, the Government are dangerously threatening unilaterally to abandon the Northern Ireland protocol.

5.23 pm

Lord Rosser (Lab) [V]: The issue is the extent to which the current difficulties faced by international hauliers are temporary ones that will be resolved in the next few months or either permanent or likely to be long-term. I am advised that the key issue is the value of exports being transported. Do the Government have any up-to-date figures on that aspect?

I am told that a higher percentage of traders than normal are having to head back to Calais empty due to Brexit difficulties; that there is a shortage of customs agents; that Northern Ireland haulage is down by half; and that while some sectors—mainly those with bigger businesses—are managing and masking the overall economic damage that is occurring, other sectors are being decimated, with agricultural rules in particular being very difficult for traders to overcome. No doubt the Minister will cover some of these points in her response.

5.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) (Con): My Lords, I am enormously grateful to my noble friend Lord Taylor of Holbeach for raising this important issue and, of course, for the contributions of all noble Lords. I am also grateful to the members of the public who shared their concerns digitally.

We have been working with the logistics industry over a number of years to understand and minimise the potential impacts on hauliers and the traders they serve at the end of the transition period. We want to increase understanding and reduce confusion across the system, and make the process as seamless as it can possibly be. Where improvements can be made, we make them as quickly as we can so that, in time, the system will adjust.

I believe that these processes will be part of normal business life, like filling in a VAT return: it is not pleasant, but you just do it. We are absolutely committed to reducing friction as much as we possibly can—to remove the grit from the engine, as the noble Lord, Lord Inglewood, said. I assure noble Lords that the latest available data shows that overall freight volumes between the UK and the EU are back to normal levels. I will write with further details about value and the number of empty containers—in fact, I will probably be writing on pretty much everything today, but that is a tribute to the quality of the debate.

I turn first to market access for hauliers, because the deal we reached with the EU allows 95% of journeys to continue as they previously did. That is one of the most important things that we were able to deliver for the haulage sector as a whole. I assure the Lord, Lord Bradshaw, that we received a substantial amount of advice, both commissioned and unsolicited, from a wide range of voices in the logistics sector.

As we have heard today from several noble Lords, specialist hauliers—those involved in cultural and sporting events—have significant concerns following the TCA,

and they have of course been impacted because of the number of internal EU movements on which they rely. Market access agreements for hauliers transporting equipment for cultural events was discussed regularly and in detail during the negotiations between the UK and the EU. The UK put forward specific proposals for liberalised access but the EU was unable to agree more flexible arrangements. Of course, the Department for Transport remains in contact with the industry, and we are also working in close collaboration with DCMS and BEIS to see what we can do to support the creative industries.

Turning to the wider changes—perhaps a little beyond transport—introduced by the end of the transition period, on exports, since the start of January, traders and hauliers have needed to comply with new requirements to export to the EU, including customs declarations and sanitary and phytosanitary checks. I am pleased to say that the number of turn-backs at the border is far lower than some forecasts and, indeed, than some noble Lords suggested in their remarks today. For example, the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, who called it a complete disaster, might be interested to know fewer than 5% of trucks at the short straits have to be turned back, and some of those will be because they do not have a valid Covid certificate, not because they do not have the correct customs forms. We need to temper our messages. I am not saying that there is no room for improvement—we must strain every sinew to make sure that people are fully aware of their obligations—but I am saying that the system is not completely broken, as has been implied by some noble Lords.

On imports, we have assisted international hauliers by taking a phased approach to the introduction of various checks. Until 1 July, traders can import non-controlled goods from the EU by using the existing customs processes or by making a declaration in their own records at the point the goods entered GB, followed by a supplementary declaration, which must be submitted to HMRC within 170 days of the date of import. That seems a reasonable and doable solution. The next milestone is 1 April and relates to some products of animal origin; we are of course communicating those changes. The more significant change happens from July 2021, when traders moving any goods will have to make full customs declarations at the point of importation and pay relevant tariffs.

Of course, we are taking many steps to make sure that we as a Government are ready and that traders are ready. We are making sure that HMRC can cope with the increased volumes by building on the successful delivery and upscaling of systems for the end of the transition period. I will write with more detail, particularly to my noble friend Lord Holmes, who I understand is a bit of an expert, so I will need some officials' help with that.

We are also delivering new compliance capabilities to improve HMRC's ability to spot and tackle non-compliance, including using data from when staged controls end. We are introducing a compliance approach to support traders to get ready and continuing to take robust action against those who choose not to comply. We are streamlining authorisation requirements, applications and processes to help meet the expected

increase in demand and to improve effectiveness. We are also working with the intermediary sector to increase capacity and capability for traders to comply with the new declaration requirements.

Of course, all those changes need to be communicated, and the Government have done an enormous amount of outreach to hauliers and haulage managers. That started many months ago, and it continues. It is continually being improved. We are learning lessons and putting them in place. All information is provided on GOV.UK, and there is a haulier handbook, which is updated when needed. We engaged in the process of drafting the handbook with Logistics UK, the Road Haulage Association and many others to ensure that it was as clear as possible. It is published in English and 13 other EU languages. We will consider other languages if there is a demonstrated need, but we feel that we have enough at the moment. We also have 46 information and advice sites. When I first heard about them, I thought, "What use are they going to be?", but more than 137,000 hauliers have visited them since they opened in November. I think that is astonishing. More than 11,400 hauliers have received specific border readiness consultations at our sites, so it is not surprising that less than 5% of trucks arriving at the border are fully non-compliant. We are doing all right.

My noble friend Lord Taylor of Holbeach mentioned the inland border facilities. There are, and will be, a number of them. Information on all of them has been published on GOV.UK, with details of their logistics, their functions and their facilities. Hauliers are told what to expect at the site, what they need to prepare and any key documents that they need to bring.

The noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, was concerned about whether we have been talking to EU hauliers. I can reassure him that, of course, we have. We not only speak at their industry days, but we make speeches at their major conferences and events, and we have exhibition stands both physically and virtually. Much of that will continue.

The noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, asked whether we have digital interaction. We do. We have a dedicated haulier website with an embedded live chat function. This function has on average 35 in-depth conversations, lasting 20 minutes, each day, and around 700 hauliers a day ask advice. We have agents who speak English, Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian. We are particularly pleased that that is working well. However, we understand that there are lessons to learn, and we have learned them. We must put that into our communications as we go through April and then through the second change in July.

I now turn to Northern Ireland support and the specific situation in Northern Ireland. The Government remain committed to supporting hauliers in moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. For example, we established the Trader Support Service—the TSS—which is designed to support all businesses impacted by the Northern Ireland protocol. The service is free to use, and it can complete declarations on behalf of traders without traders needing to engage directly with new digital customs systems and processes. More than 34,000 traders are registered to use the service, and thousands of declarations are being processed

[BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON] each day. The contact centre is, of course, providing additional support. To date, the TSS has processed more than 68,000 goods movements, involving 200,000 consignments, since launching. The contact centre has more than 700 staff and answers more than 17,000 calls, with an average answering speed of six seconds.

Not only do we have the TSS but there is also the movement assistance scheme—MAS—which was announced to complement the existing TSS. It provides help to all those traders who move food or agricultural products for which specific sanitary and phytosanitary—SPS—controls apply. This means that a trader moving live animals or other animal or plant products does not need to pay to have them inspected. The MAS scheme also has a dedicated helpline for general enquiries for traders and, together these measures, it is making it easier to move agri-food goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

A third intervention in Northern Ireland was Defra's digital assistance scheme—DAS—which supports the continued movement of agri-food goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. It also addresses the costs and burdens of compliance with a protocol for industry. It uses digitised certification and verification processes and was backed by a major amount of government funding.

A number of noble Lords have mentioned groupage, which is a concern that we are well aware of. We have developed two groupage models, and they have been agreed. The guidance for these models for Northern Ireland was published on 29 January, and we will be looking to see how these models work and whether further improvements can be made.

Noble Lords will know that yesterday the Government went further to support trade between GB and NI. My noble friend Lord Frost is clear that progress needs to be made to address the direct and often disproportionate impact that aspects of the protocol are having on the citizens of Northern Ireland, contrary to its intended purpose. So, yesterday, following official-level notification to the Commission earlier this week, we set out temporary technical steps that largely continue measures that are already in place. They provide more time for businesses, such as supermarkets and parcel operators, to adapt to and implement the new requirements of the protocol.

For my noble friend Lord Attlee, I will speak very briefly on abnormally large loads. I am aware of this issue, and we have taken it up with the French Government via the British embassy. I will write with further details, but we hope to have it resolved.

I have not covered haulage drivers, but I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, that they are towards the top of my list of things to do. It is a significant issue, and the Government are doing a significant amount on apprenticeships, but it is time for me to speak to the industry because I believe that it has to step up and start looking at ways to recruit its own drivers. It is critical.

To the noble Lord, Lord Snape, I say that of course we want to see a switch to rail freight where it is feasible. We had an Oral Question on this recently. It forms part of the Government's plans for the future.

All the measures I have mentioned today highlight the fact that my department and the Government are supporting hauliers to transport goods internationally on many fronts.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): The Grand Committee stands adjourned. I remind Members to sanitise their chairs and desks before leaving the Room.

5.37 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

5.45 pm

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, I apologise to the maiden speakers that we cannot give them the normal indulgence of exceeding time, but they have been granted between one and a half and two minutes as a special concession. Everyone else is restricted to one minute, except the newcomers, who equally may indulge themselves into a minute and a half after the maiden speakers. The time limit for this debate is one hour.

Space Industry

Question for Short Debate

5.46 pm

Asked by Lord Willetts

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support the United Kingdom space industry.

Lord Willetts (Con): I am delighted that your Lordships are debating the UK space industry. It is key to building back better. It is rapidly growing—by 60% in the past decade—and is spread across the whole country, from Goonhilly in Cornwall to the north of Scotland, via Guildford, Leicester, Glasgow and elsewhere. I declare my interests, especially my roles with Surrey Satellite Technology, SatixFy and Skyrora and my position as chancellor of the University of Leicester, which has a long and distinguished history of space science and is now creating a space park, which it hopes will host a national centre for space manufacturing.

I also welcome the Minister, my right honourable and noble friend Lord Frost, to his maiden speech at the end of this debate. I believe there will be two other maiden speeches as well, to which I am greatly looking forward; I am only sorry that the time constraints in this debate are so intense.

I very much welcome the initiatives the Government are taking to promote the British space sector. The National Space Council should integrate governmental policy work on space, and the investment in OneWeb was a welcome and bold initiative. The Government have also led the UN initiative on responsible behaviour in space, an excellent example of soft power. Britain is also one of the key players in the European Space Agency, which is an intergovernmental body and not

part of the European Union, which I am sure the Minister will welcome. Now the Government are committed to a comprehensive space strategy, to be published in the next six months, which is also very welcome. Meanwhile, I would like briefly to set out four challenges, which I hope the Minister will be able to address in his response at the end.

First, there is funding. Space is one of those classic areas where well-designed public spending crowds in private spending rather than driving it out, so we do need a well-funded national space programme. However, there are concerns about the future of some existing programmes; for example, the space international partnership programme, which has been part of the Government's ODA spend. There is a very tiresome media trope that developing countries should not have anything to do with space. The opposite is the case; many developing countries which do not have conventional infrastructure need space-based services even more. This programme provides for partnerships with them, and I very much hope it will be maintained. Also, a national space innovation programme was launched last year, which is an excellent initiative. Because of the lack of a long-term comprehensive spending settlement, there is a risk to that programme as well. It would be marvellous if it could be maintained.

The second challenge is regulation. The Space Industry Act 2018 sets out the framework, but it is important that the detailed regulation is correct and not too onerous. There are exciting prospects for space launch from Scotland. I pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Johnson, whose maiden speech we may hear shortly, who, when he was Minister, pushed the space launch initiative forward. We all want to see space launch from the north of Scotland soon.

This is a race and we must not be complacent. There is a real gap for a European space launch capability, because when you launch small satellites into low-earth orbit, equatorial launch is not what you are looking for, you want to launch north, over the poles, so there is competition between the north of Scotland, Sweden and Germany, which is investing a lot. If the regulations from the CAA are too onerous, we will lose out in this race, so it is important that they are proportionate.

There are also burdens of regulation on satellite operators who are not launching from the UK, but are legally based here. There are long-standing issues, which all of us who were Ministers in the past with responsibility will remember—the tricky issues around liabilities, the cost of insurance, the right balance between private insurance and ultimately the Government taking the risk. It is very important that we do not expect greater legal liabilities from UK-based entities than companies located elsewhere, particularly—I am looking again at the Minister—if EU regulation is less onerous than ours and launch companies move to the EU to escape onerous British regulation.

The Government have just launched an excellent new initiative on innovation and deregulation. Will the Minister give that team the opportunity to review the proposed space sector regulations with the industry to check that they are proportionate, promote innovation and do not put us at a disadvantage.

Thirdly, the Government's investment in OneWeb is already proving its worth. It will be crucial to Five Eyes capacities over the Arctic and it can do much more in the future when we move on to the second generation of OneWeb satellites. A lot of work was done on a British alternative to Galileo, but the original idea of a technology similar to the Galileo and GPS systems—the large satellites way out in distant orbit, further than 10,000 kilometres—would not have added resilience to the US or European system, because it would have been copying their technologies. It is far better for us to invest in a new LEO—low-earth orbit—constellation, complementing what GPS or Galileo can do.

I put it to the Minister, with his geopolitical interests, that one may imagine a deal in which the EU were given some place at the table in OneWeb in return for our getting access to Galileo once more. But as a minimum, it is important that we look at using the next generation of OneWeb satellites to deliver position, navigation and timing services. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the MoD will commission research on those services for the second generation of OneWeb satellites.

Fourthly and finally on my list, there is the role of space in tackling the climate emergency, with the prospect of COP 26 being held in Glasgow later this year. Earth observation data, in particular, is very relevant to COP 26. There is one estimate that half the 50 essential climate variables that have to be monitored can be observed only from space. There is also the visual observation of marine conservation areas—one of the main ways, incidentally, in which space-based services help developing countries, by enabling them to police their own maritime areas—as well as mapping tropical rainforests and deforestation, and helping disaster response to extreme weather events.

There is a real prospect of space playing an important role in COP 26 and the monitoring of decisions taken there. I very much hope that, given our exciting position chairing COP 26, it will be possible for us to promote and identify a distinct space strand to that discussion.

The Government are strongly committed to space. All of us who have worked closely on space policy in whatever capacity will know the potential that exists there for the UK. I very much look forward to seeing the UK play a crucial role in new technologies, space surveillance and tracking, space debris removal and in-orbit servicing. The Government have already taken very useful initiatives in space, and I hope that the Minister will be able to address the challenges I have identified today and make further progress in the future.

5.55 pm

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I welcome the maiden speakers, including the Minister. The noble Lord, Lord Willetts, has stolen my thunder a bit because he has focused very much on OneWeb, which is one element of government investment in the space industry. They co-invested half a billion pounds in OneWeb, which was a failed satellite communications company that had gone bankrupt and had to be raised from the dead. Although it is based in London, OneWeb's satellite manufacture is in Florida, and there is little

[BARONESS YOUNG OF OLD SCONE]

evidence of benefit so far to UK taxpayers or jobs. The company's plan was to provide global broadband coverage from space in the hope that it could provide an alternative secure satellite navigation system now that the UK has been thrown out of Galileo.

It is proving difficult to get information on the Government's intentions on OneWeb—the UK Space Agency declines to comment. Can the Minister confirm whether OneWeb is to be the UK Galileo alternative, as the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, outlined? If not, what has the investment of half a billion pounds secured for the UK?

5.57 pm

Baroness Randerson (LD) [V]: My Lords, there cannot be any other industry where international links are more fundamental. Since 31 December, we have been excluded from important schemes such as Galileo and EGNOS, the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service. From 25 June, UK users will lose access to the EGNOS Safety of Life Service. Can the Minister clarify the impact of that and the alternatives that the Government plan to provide?

Despite losing so much we are still awaiting the Government's space strategy. The Government's rather random decision to invest in OneWeb does not fill us with confidence. Launch is not the be-all and end-all—it is just an enabler. The space industry and its highly skilled researchers need a strategy that amounts to much more than picking possible winners. It needs balanced investment.

5.58 pm

Lord Parker of Minsmere (CB) (Maiden Speech) [V]: My Lords, I am delighted to have this brief opportunity to make my maiden speech. It gives me a moment to put on record my great thanks for the generous kindness of the Convenor, Black Rod, the Clerk and the excellent House authorities. I want to make special mention of Kate Long, Daisy Christy, Ayesha Bhutta and Gabby Longdin. I also thank my noble supporters—both colleagues and personal friends for many years—the noble Baroness, Lady Manningham-Buller, and the noble Lord, Lord Evans of Weardale.

I am honoured to join many very distinguished noble Lords and friends in this House whom I have valued over the years as teammates in this country's national security machinery, whether in the police service, the Armed Forces, the Civil Service or in political, judicial or scrutiny roles. There are too many to name today, but all are bound together in the single common endeavour of protecting this country. For my own part, I could not make this maiden speech without taking the opportunity to pay tribute—as I may now do from the outside—to the exceptional dedication and skill of all those who work so hard in MI5 and its partner organisations to keep this country safe through thick and thin. They do more than we know, and we owe them our wholehearted admiration and thanks.

I had been very much looking forward to contributing where I could to the legislative programme of this House and perhaps even serving on a Select Committee in due course. This House is tackling a slew of important

Bills on national security matters of considerable interest to me, where I had hoped I might add some value. I would also have liked to engage on a range of other matters, including conservation, faith, social justice and science and technology, including this important question before us now.

However, as your Lordships will understand, this first speech must also be my last for some time. Since my recent appointment to this House, Her Majesty the Queen has graciously further appointed me as the next Lord Chamberlain of the Royal Household. I am absolutely delighted and humbled by such an extraordinary honour. It follows that the work that I had planned to do in this House as a participating Member will now properly be restricted to my prospective duties as Lord Chamberlain, following in the highly distinguished footsteps of the noble Earl, Lord Peel. I very much look forward to serving Her Majesty in every way that I can in this role.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): Congratulations, Lord Parker. I call the noble Viscount, Lord Waverley.

6.01 pm

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to warmly welcome the noble Lord, Lord Parker, into our midst. The noble Lord has served our country within the national security space during particularly testing times. In a career of public service spanning 37 years, he rose to the rank of MI5's director-general. On behalf of the House, I confine myself to thanking him and his former colleagues in MI5, together with the other intelligence agencies and police, for making our country a safer place.

In the normal course of events, he would embody the contribution that your Lordships' House brings to the national debate. As he has just informed us, however, Her Majesty has other plans and has determined that she wishes him to head the Royal Household as Lord Chamberlain. He should know that, while his contribution to our deliberations is on hold, and we wish him well in his new post, we await his return and trust that, in the meantime, he can also find time to follow his passion of watching and photographing birds.

I offer just one brief point on space. The relationship with China is pivotal to the UK space programme, and vice versa. China has, as a national priority, the development of new, innovative approaches in space science applications and space skills development. The UK is a recognised world leader in these areas. Cool heads need to prevail generally in this relationship, taking account of course of all the recent, well-rehearsed challenges, but also to reflect carefully on the potential strategic nature of that relationship.

6.03 pm

Lord Bates (Con): My Lords, the UK space industry is made possible because it adheres to the laws of science but also to the laws of humans, upheld by the United Nations. Satellites orbit on agreed paths and transmit their information on agreed frequencies. Through these laws, we avoid chaos in the cosmos. There is a trust between nations evident above the earth that sometimes eludes us on it. When viewed from space,

we see the earth without borders; we see a beautiful planet of colour and contrast, home to all the life we are currently aware of in the universe. This should remind us of our solemn responsibility to care for our common home and for those we share it with. Space invites us to explore its wonders and unravel its mysteries, and we can do that if we remember the first law of human dynamics: we can accomplish immeasurably more if we work together and learn from each other.

6.04 pm

Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB) [V]: My Lords, I was delighted to see that the European Space Agency recently announce that it was intending to send a disabled person into space. There was much celebrating from non-disabled people, who saw it as a step towards inclusion, but personally, I would prefer it if it were possible for me to get onto the Northern line.

Asking the International Paralympic Committee to help highlights some of the challenges of not being able to go down the more traditional recruitment route. The sector employs 42,000 people but, as with other areas, it is hard to find data on representation, and we know that getting into STEM subjects is not easy for disabled people. It is not quite comparative data, but the British Medical Association stated that 77% of respondents were worried about being treated unfavourably if they disclosed a disability or a long-term health condition to their employer or place of study. I would be interested in the data for the sector and, as we are under a strict time limit today, I will just say that I would also be interested in the employment of disabled people and how it can be included in a future strategy—not just one person being sent into space, if the ESA finds someone.

6.05 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, it is good that we have the noble Lord, Lord Frost, with us to be accountable for Brexit, because he has a lot to be accountable for. His UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement is the most damaging treaty negotiated by a British Government for more than 50 years. It reduces our trade and undermines our co-operation, and nowhere is the damage of Brexit greater than to our space industry. Some £1.2 billion has been needlessly squandered in our expulsion from the Galileo project, and £500 million has been speculatively invested in OneWeb. Dr Bleddyn Bowen, a space policy expert at Leicester University, says that the OneWeb investment is a “tech and business gamble”, and OneWeb satellites have been described as unsuitable for navigational purposes by our own space agency. Space is turning into another Brexit catastrophe, and no one is being held accountable.

6.06 pm

Lord Risby (Con) [V]: My Lords, first, I welcome the maiden speakers. The Sutherland spaceport will be the first spaceport in the United Kingdom, with the first launch as early as next year. I would be grateful to hear from my noble friend—and does he agree—that the demand for commercial, vertical and horizontal launch facilities is enormous. If so, have other sites been identified, boosting employment and revenues not only in Scotland but in the whole of the United Kingdom?

6.07 pm

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Con) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, humans can travel in space at 40,000 kilometres an hour, and I will have to speak as fast to deliver my maiden speech and refer to my relevant interests at Harvard, Kings and in Skyrora, in a minute. First, I thank Black Rod, the doorkeepers and my sponsors, my noble friend Lord Risby and the noble Lord, Lord Desai, for helping me acclimatise to an environment that is so similar and yet so different to the Commons, to which I was elected three times, and where I spent 10 increasingly tumultuous years in various roles, including as head of the Policy Unit and as Universities and Science Minister under three different Prime Ministers.

My noble friend Lord Willetts referred to the Space Industry Act, which I had the privilege of taking through the Commons as Space Minister. It received Royal Assent three years ago, yet we are still waiting for the regulatory framework to arrive. We need it fast and we need it to be proportionate, as my noble friend Lord Willetts rightly said. We also need much greater commitment. If we are serious about developing sovereign launch capability, which was one objective of that Act, we need a great much greater commitment to ensuring that it is UK industry that benefits from opportunities from the Act, including launch, not just the usual giant US aerospace companies. We messed this up once before as a country in 1971, when we abandoned our Black Arrow programme after being made promises of free rides for our satellites on US launches. Those offers disappeared and left us the only country to have launched a satellite successfully into orbit and then to have abandoned that independent capability. Let us make a reality of sovereign launch capability and not make those mistakes again.

6.08 pm

Lord Vaizey of Didcot (Con): It is a great honour to follow my noble friend Lord Johnson, to welcome him to the House and to praise him for an excellent maiden speech, which I know will be the first of many fantastic contributions he will make to this House. I have to say that I know all the Johnsons, but let me say in the privacy of this room, to go no further, that he is by far my favourite. As he alluded to in his remarks, he has had an extremely distinguished career, working for the *Financial Times* on the Lex column but also as its Delhi correspondent; he has written a seminal book on contemporary India. He was a distinguished Member of Parliament, the head of the Policy Unit and indeed a fantastic Science and Universities Minister, highly regarded by his sector. I have just realised that I am sitting between two former Science and Universities Ministers, both of whom I love. However, for the purposes of the maiden speech, my noble friend Lord Johnson is my favourite former Science Minister, at least for the next minute. He will make a wonderful contribution for the next 50 years, because he is also very young.

The International Trade Minister Graham Stuart announced the space sector Covid support plan this week, which is very welcome, but it will take time to deliver an impact. In the meantime we must find a way to bring forward the next phase of investment in the national space innovation programme, as mentioned

[LORD VAIZEY OF DIDCOT]
by the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, which has been delayed by the postponement of the CSR. The current phase runs out at the end of this month. If that is allowed to happen, it will create another R&D gap, further compounding the impact of the lost EU contracts. We must also find ways of bringing forward other delayed capital investments—for example the disruptive innovation for space centre proposals at Westcott and Fawley, which will underpin future private sector R&D investments. I end my speech.

6.10 pm

Baroness Wheatcroft (CB) [V]: I welcome today's maiden speakers and thank the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, for the way in which he introduced this debate. I was interested to hear his positive comments on OneWeb, which were particularly striking in contrast to the remarks others have made on that issue. Following the latest fundraising for OneWeb, can the Minister tell us where the country's holding in that company now stands? It had been 42.2% and I wonder whether it has been significantly diluted. Could he also tell the Committee how much money was spent on trying to develop our own GPS system, a scheme that has now been abandoned?

More positively, astronauts such as Chris Hadfield are now talking about colonising the moon. NASA is setting up a lunar village, or has plans to. Can the Minister say whether the government's space strategy will be similarly forward looking? Can he also tell us how we are regulating commercial activity in space?

6.11 pm

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, we have been involved in space for over 50 years. In 2000 I was recognised by the Americans for my work in the national security space missions of both our nations over the previous three years. In the one minute allowed, I intend to address that critical and crucial national security space mission.

The UK must harness existing UK and Five Eyes capabilities in geosynchronous satellites and medium earth orbit capabilities, particularly low earth orbit capabilities, for a sovereign space-based position, navigation and timing system. This is crucial militarily, for our nation's security and for the operation of many things. It should be interoperable with the Five Eyes nations and also provide secure satellite communications. This is forced on us not least by the outrageous behaviour of our European friends over the use of the Galileo system. We should also consider establishing a national space operation centre. Could the Minister let us know if this is the plan and by when it would happen?

6.13 pm

Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton (Con) [V]: My Lords, the Government's decision to create UK space command is a golden opportunity for greater co-operation between defence and industry. Its creation is a huge step forward because space is fundamental to our national security, vital to our economy and to our very way of life. As space becomes ever more congested and contested, it is critical that the UK is integrated in its approach. It is envisaged that space command will interact with the

UK Space Agency to deliver joint national space capability. It will be a joint command based at RAF High Wycombe and be staffed from all three services of the Armed Forces, the Civil Service, and key members of the commercial sector. At its heart, its success will be determined by our ability to network our capabilities and share skills between industry and defence through the enterprise approach. Central to the ability to share skills will be the greater use of reserves splitting their time between uniformed service in the military and civilian employment in the space industry.

6.14 pm

Lord St John of Bletso (CB): My Lords, I declare my interests as disclosed in the register. If the Government's ambition is for the UK to seize 10% of the global space economy by 2030, there needs to be much more joined-up thinking and a clear policy. I seriously question the likely success of the Government's deal to rescue OneWeb. While it is admirable and imperative that the UK creates and supports a launch capability, such a strategy must go hand in hand with supporting those designing and building satellites, and constellation of satellites, which will need launching. My simple question is whether the UK's funding of the space sector is effective at maximising growth. The UK needs to encourage innovation in the space industry and support space start-ups, which have the potential to deliver world-class and world-first technology.

6.15 pm

Baroness Mobarik (Con): My Lords, my noble friend Lord Willetts mentioned Scotland. A'Mhòine in Melness, Sutherland was announced as suitable for a vertical launch site and spaceport in 2018, promising increased economic activity in the area. But some two and a half years on, the community is divided, with some of the opinion that this would be destructive to the natural environment, as the site is within the largest area of peat and wetland anywhere in the world. It is at present under consideration for UNESCO world heritage site status. The project for the spaceport is currently halted and under judicial review. If the spaceport is located in Unst in the Shetland Isles, the alternative site mooted, will the Government make efforts to offer investments and incentives to other related space industries to locate in Melness in Sutherland? Economic resource and resilience are vital for the long-term future of the area and its youth, and space offers that opportunity.

6.16 pm

Lord Birt (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest as, until recently, vice-chair of Eutelsat. LEO—low earth orbit—satellites have high potential. Unlike geostationary satellites, they have low latency and universal reach, enabling instant broadband communication anywhere on the planet. But OneWeb, the LEO player in which the Government recently acquired a stake, has no track record, limited capability and went bust. How will OneWeb compete against other LEO players including Elon Musk, Amazon, China and the EU's flagship project? How will OneWeb finance the massive rollout needed and acquire the capability to enter markets and reach customers? I ask the Minister: when will the Government finally articulate a long-term vision and plan for OneWeb?

6.17 pm

Lord Sarfraz (Con) [V]: My Lords, I too congratulate all the maiden speakers today and declare an interest as set out in the register. The United Kingdom can be the world leader in space technology. There are many spin-off technologies that originated from space research, including ear thermometers, artificial limbs, water purification and even enriched baby food, so this is not about space alone. Last year, we witnessed the SpaceX Crew Dragon transporting NASA astronauts to the international space station. This could never have happened without close co-operation between government and a young company; our success in space depends on that spirit of partnership.

While I congratulate the Government on their significant efforts, we need to think about strengthening our space situation awareness capability, developing financing for constellations and improving insurance for small satellites. Finally, we are currently in the middle of a recruitment drive for the next cohort of British astronauts. This is an opportunity for us to inspire kids in schools across the country by talking about space, letting them hear from British astronauts and helping them develop a love for the stars and the planets.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): I call the noble Lord, Lord Mountevans. We do not seem to have him. I will then go on to—oh, have we got you?

6.19 pm

Lord Mountevans (CB) [V]: My apologies. The essential satellite services that maritime operators, the Royal Navy and indeed all of us rely on are at risk from growing congestion, debris and threats from irresponsible or hostile actors in space. There is no international rules-based order as such in space—indeed, no organisation to oversee properly the development of such an order. The International Maritime Organization, based here in London, has performed a wonderful role in establishing rules for maritime. Is it not time that we had an international space organisation to promote a safe and sustainable space, perhaps also run by the UN and based here in the UK?

6.19 pm

Lord Moylan (Con): My Lords, perhaps I may briefly, in advance of his maiden speech, welcome my noble friend the Minister to your Lordships' House. He brings with him a rare combination of diplomatic skills, commercial knowledge and political astuteness, having served as Her Majesty's ambassador in Copenhagen, as the chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association and as a special adviser to the Prime Minister, both at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and at No.10. He has also negotiated not one but two major agreements with a tough and aggressive counterparty, two more than many of the most distinguished diplomats of his or recent generations can claim. I am sure that we all welcome him.

I welcome this debate. As my noble friend Lord Willetts clearly explained, we have tremendous opportunities in LEO satellite technology, but to achieve our potential as a sovereign independent nation, we need a strategy and I look forward to hearing further from my noble friend on that.

6.20 pm

Lord Bowness (Non-Afl) [V]: My Lords, I welcome the Minister and look forward to his maiden speech. There are many questions about the £400 million purchase of OneWeb, a bankrupt UK company trading in the US that required a ministerial direction for the purchase to proceed. Have all the US court consents to the purchase now been obtained? Is the manufacturing capability to be transferred from the US to the UK and when will that happen? Will we ensure that satellite launches are not dependent on the Russian Roscosmos agency? How does the purchase of OneWeb fit with the work of the space-based navigation and timing programme, which is exploring new ways of delivering satellite navigation to the UK? What part in our space policy will be played by the international agreement between the UK and the US on technology safeguards associated with US participation in space launches from the UK? When will that be debated in the House? If we are to develop an alternative version of Galileo or GPS, what is the estimated cost and how long will it take?

6.21 pm

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con) [V]: My Lords, the future is data and the future is now. Much of that data needs to, and can come from, space, not least EOD, as my noble friend Lord Willetts pointed out in his excellent introduction. We also have a phenomenal opportunity to bolster our cyber effort and I, like the noble Lord, Lord Parker, in his excellent maiden speech, pay tribute to all in our security services who work tirelessly and rightly in the shadows to keep us safe 24/7. We have a phenomenal opportunity with the new satellite industry. Does my noble friend the Minister agree that it is a great opportunity for Scotland as part of the United Kingdom? How does the space strategy fit within the overall industrial, digital and data strategies? Does he agree that space is not the final frontier but, if properly approached, is a universe of economic endeavour and possibility?

6.23 pm

Lord Cromwell (CB) [V]: My Lords, we rightly celebrate the UK's outstanding ability in the technical and scientific fields that are making science fiction into science fact, but we must also build on the UK's ability in creating international law. Our maritime history is relevant here. Space is a new frontier governed by, frankly, a few pretty generic treaties that lack key signatories. We have made progress but much more needs to be done if space is not to become, as frontiers tend to do, a mass of short-term competing commercial and military interests. That may well be more difficult to achieve than the technology for the exploration and exploitation of space, but if we fail to regulate it properly, if we simply give rein to the human instincts that have so damaged this planet and if we make the heavens a hell, as with climate change, those who come after us will curse our lack of foresight and self-control. Will the Minister commit to engaging with this?

6.24 pm

Baroness Verma (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Willetts for this debate, be it short. I also want to welcome my noble friend the Minister

[BARONESS VERMA]

and congratulate him on his maiden speech and new role. As a person from Leicester, where we have the National Space Centre and where the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, is the chancellor of the University of Leicester, I want to ask my noble friend where we can explore better collaboration programmes with the emerging markets in space development and high-tech knowledge exchange. Cities such as Leicester need to reinvent themselves post pandemic. We have brilliant universities and brilliant research collaborations going on across the world. We now need to maximise those partnerships globally. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Sarfraz, that it is not just about space; it is about all the other side events that can come into fruition from better collaboration.

6.25 pm

Lord McNally (LD) [V]: My Lords, it is very clear from what the noble Lord, Lord Johnson, said, that we have been down this road before. Some of us are old enough to remember Blue Streak and Black Arrow. What is needed first from the Minister is a clear commitment to a long-term strategy for the space industry. In doing that, will he clarify for us what the role of the national space council will be and how it will act as a conduit between the private and public sectors? Will the Minister also tell us whether either academic or commercial space co-operation will be inhibited by the powers in the National Security and Investment Bill now before Parliament? As a last thought, will he consider using his diplomatic and negotiating skills to persuade the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, to return to government to give the sector the political vision and commitment that it needs?

6.26 pm

Lord Lennie (Lab) [V]: My Lords, from Labour's Front Bench I welcome the noble Lords, Lord Parker and Lord Johnson, who spoke earlier, and I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Frost, who we will hear from in about 45 seconds' time. There is a guy, Sanjeev Gupta, who currently rents a one-bedroom flat above a hairdresser's on Lewisham High Street so that he can work from home. Sanjeev is a geologist, and in his flat he has five computers and two other screens for Zoom meetings. He is helping to direct and control the movements of Perseverance to drill and collect samples to help determine whether there has ever been life on Mars. Compare his endeavour with the Government's investment in OneWeb, against the advice of experts and the concerns of the space agency. Is this OneWeb investment part of the UK's global navigation satellite system? If not, what is it? As we have heard, OneWeb continues to manufacture its satellites in Florida. The high-skilled, well-paid jobs will come only if we get our investment and industrial strategy in sync—or are we destined, like Sanjeev Gupta, to rent more flats in Lewisham from which to explore the final frontier?

6.27 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, it is an honour to make my maiden speech in this debate and it is a privilege to do so here. I am grateful to the noble Lord,

Lord Willetts, for initiating this debate. I know, not least because I was an official in his department when he was the Minister responsible for this issue, that he has a long-standing and most important interest in this subject. Under his leadership, he reinvigorated this country's work on the space sector, and where we are now is very much the product of his efforts. We intend to build on them to the benefit of the whole country. He made a number of very important points and, indeed, listed some challenges, as did many other noble Lords, and I will respond to them as I go.

First, however, I begin with thank yous. They may be traditional but they are no less heartfelt for that. I thank Black Rod and the Clerk of the Parliaments for their help and advice, and I thank the doorkeepers, who, in the short time since my introduction, have been unfailingly helpful and friendly. I am grateful to my two introducers: my noble friend Lord Shinkwin—a friend and colleague from our time supporting this country's great wine and spirits industries—and my noble friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, a distinguished Minister in many capacities and currently in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I also congratulate my noble friend Lord Johnson of Marylebone and the noble Lord, Lord Parker of Minsmere, on their incisive maiden speeches, the latter particularly on his distinguished future appointment.

As has been said, it is also my own maiden speech today. I have spent most of my life working on international relations in various capacities—on international trade, as the head of trade associations and, of course, as a diplomat—although I fear I seem to have acquired a rather undiplomatic reputation during the last year or two in negotiating with our European friends. It has been an honour to have been part, for 25 years, of the best diplomatic corps in the world. I am delighted to rejoin in this House many former colleagues from that world, all more distinguished than I in the depth of their knowledge and breadth of their experience. I look forward to debating with them, as I am sure I will, but more importantly to learning from their expertise.

I now turn to my subject. The UK has an extraordinary history of discovery and innovation. We remain a global innovation leader and we want to cement the UK's place as a science superpower. Our aim is to invest in science and research that will deliver economic growth and societal benefits for decades to come, and to build the foundations for the industries of tomorrow. Space technology is a clear example of what can be done. The global space market could be worth more than \$1 trillion by 2040. The past decade has, indeed, brought a global space revolution and the exploitation of space is vital to our economic future. As my noble friend Lord Holmes said, it is a frontier of possibilities.

In the UK, we are pioneering a new space age. On the back of the Space Industry Act 2018, we have established a new National Space Council to co-ordinate space policy. I reassure my noble friends Lord Willetts and Lord Moylan and the noble Lord, Lord McNally, that we will publish very soon—this summer—the new national space strategy to boost UK space innovation, and that it will be appropriately funded. Our space sector already employs 42,000 people across the country, from Cornwall's Goonhilly Earth Station to a future

Shetlands space centre. The Government are working to help every region to benefit. My noble friend Lady Verma underlined the importance of making sure that the whole country benefits. We are backing plans for a network of space hubs to attract commercial investment. It is very important that all this work, as the noble Lord, Lord St John, said, supports the aims of boosting maximum growth across the country.

From Guildford to Glasgow, the UK is already home to world-leading small satellite manufacturers. Now we want to be Europe's best destination for launching them into orbit too. I agree with many noble Lords who noted that there is competition for this facility. We are investing £40 million to ensure that we match up to that. My noble friend Lady Mobarik raised the potential spaceport in Scotland, and I can reassure her that we are considering appropriate plans for both the sites she mentioned. We are very conscious of the spin-off benefits for communities wherever facilities eventually settle.

We expect the first launches in 2022 and I reassure my noble friend Lord Johnson that of course we intend the regulatory framework to be in place by then. On that point, which my noble friend Lord Willetts also raised, our rules will be based on the world's most modern space legislation, building on industry consultation to ensure safety and drive innovation. Of course, outside the EU, as he said, we also have the ability to set these rules for ourselves and create the best possible context for innovation and growth. It is certainly not our policy to have more complicated legislation than the European Union in any area, and my own responsibilities as Minister for the opportunities of Brexit underline why we will take this seriously.

My noble friend also raised our aspirations for OneWeb and associated issues. I note the concerns raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, the noble Lord, Lord Birt, and many others, and the controversy that still surrounds this investment. We believe that it was a justified risk and will show benefits in the future. We are committed to making a success of our investment in OneWeb, and we anticipate that the satellite communications service will be live at the end of this year. The noble Baroness, Lady Wheatcroft, asked about our share in OneWeb. We have invested £500 million and we maintain a significant share in OneWeb. This will obviously dilute over time but we will retain a special share, giving us the final say over the company's future and the technology that it uses.

We are also working across government, including the Ministry of Defence of course, to ensure resilient delivery of positional navigation and timing. This is central to underpinning the UK's critical national infrastructure. The space-based positioning, navigation and timing programme is currently analysing a number of innovative options for capability in this area, including different satellites at different orbits. We will set out our requirements soon.

As my noble friend Lord Bates and many other noble Lords said, although we aspire to be a leading space power in our own right, we cannot achieve everything that we want to achieve without international collaboration. As has been said, the UK is a proud founding member of the European Space Agency.

Currently, we invest more than £370 million annually in the agency, ensuring that UK scientists and engineers take lead roles in ground-breaking missions. As many noble Lords mentioned, last month the European Space Agency made its first call for new astronauts since 2008. I very much hope that we shall see new British candidates to follow Tim Peake in reaching for the stars, inspired by the huge opportunities before us.

Our EU trade agreement, which I negotiated, has opened the door to our continued partnership in the world's largest earth observation programme, Copernicus. The noble Baroness, Lady Randerson, asked about other EU programmes. In those negotiations, we were not able to reach a satisfactory outcome that would have enabled participation in our interests.

We are also investing in new broader international partnerships. Only last week, the UK signed the world's first space bridge with Australia, deepening a space relationship that goes back to the test launch of the Black Arrow rocket from Woomera in South Australia, 51 years ago today. My noble friend Lord Willetts raised COP 26. We are committed to ensuring that it is used to showcase world-leading scientific expertise in this and many other areas. Also on international collaboration, my noble friend Lord Willetts raised the space international partnership programme. This is the biggest such programme and is world beating. We will take his points into account as we consider the future of this programme and its funding. We will also reflect on the suggestions from the noble Lords, Lord Mountevans and Lord Cromwell, regarding the governance of space—a new frontier, as has been said—and an international space organisation. We will draw this to the attention of the responsible Minister.

UK space businesses need skills and technology to compete. That is why, last week, we announced new support for a space sector export academy to help build valuable trade skills. We are using space to support STEM education, notably by helping university students and apprentices to access placements in our thriving space enterprises.

I note, and will reflect on, the comments of the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson, about access for disabled communities and others in this whole area. I will draw this to the attention of the responsible Ministers.

Last year, the UK Space Agency launched its national space innovation programme—the UK's first dedicated fund for cutting-edge space technologies. Partnerships with the private sector are of course also critical. If I may be forgiven another personal allusion in a maiden speech, I come from the greatest city in the East Midlands, the city of Derby, where my parents spent their working lives at that great British company Rolls Royce. That is why I was personally pleased to see the Government's announcement in January of a partnership with Rolls Royce to investigate the possibility of nuclear power in space exploration. This will be a genuinely game-changing technology.

On space and defence, as my noble friend Lord Lancaster mentioned, last year we announced the new joint Space Command and have recently appointed its first commander, Air Commodore Paul Godfrey. I can reassure the noble Lord, Lord West, that we are committed to protecting national security in space, as we are

[LORD FROST]

anywhere else. This is the first priority of the Government. We are committed to countering aggression in space and, as has been said, we have worked to achieve the UN resolution on responsible behaviours in space—once again, a first.

To conclude, I thank my noble friend Lord Willetts once again for raising this important question. I have tried to answer all the many rich points made in this debate, and of course I will review *Hansard* and write if there are any points that I have failed to deal with. This Government are backing British businesses and scientists to ensure the maximum benefit: economic, scientific and, as my noble friend Lord Bates said so eloquently, for the imagination. Our space programme will forge the next chapter in our space story.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, perhaps I might presume to congratulate the Minister on his maiden speech and extend to him a very warm welcome both to the House and to his ministerial post. I also congratulate all the speakers on the discipline with which we have conducted this debate—including the maiden speakers, who have shown great promise for future contributions to the House.

That completes the business before the Grand Committee this afternoon. I remind Members to sanitise their desks and chairs before leaving the Room. The Committee is adjourned.

Committee adjourned at 6.40 pm.