

**Wednesday  
18 May 2022**

**Volume 714  
No. 6**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

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

**Wednesday 18 May 2022**

---



# House of Commons

*Wednesday 18 May 2022*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Speaker's Statement

11.34 am

**Mr Speaker:** The House will know that a Member has been arrested in connection with an investigation into an allegation of very serious criminal offences. I understand that the Member has confirmed that he will not attend the House of Commons while an investigation is ongoing. I, the House of Commons Commission and the House Service take the safety of our staff and parliamentary community as a whole very seriously and are ensuring that any necessary measures are taken in respect of MPs' employees and staff.

All Members and staff have access to the individual sexual misconduct adviser by contacting the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme helpline and they should not hesitate to use it—or, if it is believed that a crime has been committed, please go directly to the police. While the investigation is ongoing, I believe that it would be wholly inappropriate for any further reference to be made to the matter in the House, including any attempt to name the Member concerned. I would appreciate your co-operation on this matter.

I remind Members that the private Member's Bill ballot book is open in the No Lobby today until the rise of the House, except during Divisions. The ballot draw will be held at 9 am tomorrow in Committee Room 15, where the Chair of Ways and Means will be on hand and drawing out the lucky winners.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### SCOTLAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### UK Shared Prosperity Fund

1. **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the impact of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund on regional inequality in Scotland. [900000]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack):** Rangers, that great British football club, are in Seville tonight for the Europa league final. I hope that the whole House, including the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), who is an avid Hearts fan, and the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who is an avid Hibs fan, will join me in wishing them a famous victory.

All areas in Scotland will receive an allocation of UKSPF via a needs-based funding formula. Local leaders are empowered to design their own interventions in line with the levelling up missions. We are determined to boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards.

**Dr Davies:** Will my right hon. Friend kindly explain how the allocation of SPF funding in Scotland and across the rest of the UK will help level up those communities more effectively than the previous structural funding?

**Mr Jack:** The UK shared prosperity fund is a central pillar of our ambitious levelling-up agenda for places across Scotland and provides £212 million of new funding for local investment. Local partners have far greater flexibility than before. They can invest in priority areas and target funds where they are needed. Allocations are being made on a needs-based assessment, including a specifically tailored proportion for rural areas in Scotland.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Scotland has been short-changed by the loss of EU funding, leaving a 40% reduction in the funding that we would have received from the EU. It is not only the Scottish Government saying that but the Treasury Committee, the House of Lords Constitution Committee and Bloomberg, so there is clearly no levelling up. What steps has the Secretary of State taken to ensure that Scotland's shortfall in funding is remedied, and remedied fast?

**Mr Jack:** I seek to correct the hon. Lady: the funding is tapered with UK structural funds. EU structural funds and UK structural funds are tapered. We paid into EU funds, and the EU is still paying into Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, but the advantage of Brexit is that we now have control over that money and can decide how we spend it. The amount of money in total has not been reduced in any way.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, Liz Twist.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): For years, Ministers have assured organisations in receipt of EU structural funding that the UK shared prosperity fund would maintain that funding after Brexit. Finally, the Government published the details of their shared prosperity fund and, for organisations such as the world-leading European Marine Energy Centre based in Orkney, it was a brutal blow. The Government broke their promise. As a result, EMEC, a site that has tested more marine energy devices than any other in the world, now faces closure. What is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that his Cabinet colleagues keep their promise of matching the funding for EMEC and other Interreg projects in Scotland?

**Mr Jack:** Discussions with EMEC are ongoing between my office, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. We are making progress, but there is further progress to be made. To that end, I am happy to offer a face-to-face meeting with EMEC.

#### Future Defence Policy and the Armed Forces

2. **Sally-Ann Hart** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on future defence policy and the role of the armed forces in Scotland. [900001]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack):** I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues and the Ministry of Defence. The integrated review sets out the Government's ambitions for defence and foreign policy over the next decade. British armed forces personnel

in Scotland play a crucial role in defending the whole of the United Kingdom and our allies, and will continue to do so.

**Sally-Ann Hart:** For centuries, Scotland and the rest of the UK have had a united defence stance and military bond. Will my right hon. Friend outline what assessment his Department has made of the direct and indirect impacts, including economic, that Scotland benefits from as a result of being part of the United Kingdom?

**Mr Jack:** The benefits are enormous. Scotland plays a crucial role in the defence of the UK and our NATO allies. The UK strategic bases in Scotland, RAF Lossiemouth and the UK's nuclear deterrent at Faslane, serve to make the whole of the United Kingdom safer. The economic benefits for Scotland as a result of MOD investment are significant. MOD expenditure with industry and commerce in the last year alone totalled almost £2 billion. Defence investment in Scottish shipbuilding will see order books full until the 2030s. Construction is under way to deliver three cutting edge Type 26 frigates at BAE Systems in Govan, five Type 31 frigates at Babcock in Rosyth, and only this week the MOD awarded a £30 million contract to Babcock in Rosyth to maintain the Royal Navy's two aircraft carriers, securing 300 jobs for the next 10 years.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State will know that the Scottish Affairs Committee, of which the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) is an assiduous member, is conducting a series of inquiries into defence in Scotland. One of the things the Committee has found in its almost concluded report on the military landscape in Scotland is that only 2.5% of total military spending is spent on Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises. What is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that situation is rectified?

**Mr Jack:** The hon. Gentleman mentions SMEs. The bulk of the spending—literally billions of pounds, worth thousands of jobs—is with British Aerospace and Babcock.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned the awarding of the contract to Rosyth dockyard, securing 300 jobs in Rosyth, and the frigates and destroyers being built on the Clyde. Does he not agree with me that it is good that at least one of Scotland's Governments can actually build ships that float?

**Mr Jack:** I think my hon. Friend refers to ferries, and he is absolutely right. I think the ferries float. They just cannot seem to finish them or make them work, or find anything that gets close to resembling a ferry.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): During the 2014 independence referendum, the Secretary of State's Government promised that 12,500 armed forces personnel would be based in Scotland. The current figure is more than 25% below that 2014 promise. With the downward pressure on the armed forces across the board, when will his Government admit that they will never actually meet that target?

**Mr Jack:** Recruitment remains healthy for young Scots, both as regulars and reservists. I am sure the new recruits in Scotland are absolutely buoyed by the First Minister's new love of the nuclear alliance that is NATO.

### Government's Energy Security Strategy

3. **Saqib Bhatti** (Meriden) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the Government's energy security strategy on Scotland. [900002]

13. **Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the Government's energy security strategy on Scotland. [900012]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart):** Our recently published energy security strategy will ensure clean, affordable and secure power for generations to come. The strategy sets out how Great Britain will accelerate the deployment of wind, nuclear, solar and hydrogen, while continuing to support the production of domestic oil and gas in the near term.

**Saqib Bhatti:** Nuclear power has proven to be a safe, cleaner and more efficient source of energy. With the Government's plans for new modular nuclear reactors, nuclear will play an important role in our energy mix and reduce household energy bills. Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that the Scottish Government dug their heels in and refused to get behind the UK Government's drive for greater nuclear energy capacity?

**Iain Stewart:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Nuclear energy is a safe, clean and reliable source of power and it will play an important role in the UK's energy mix and transition. In particular, the new technology of small modular reactors offers huge opportunities. Scotland has a long tradition of nuclear power and we hope that the Scottish Government will be open-minded about working with us on it.

**Tom Randall:** Putin's illegal war in Ukraine has highlighted Europe's dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. Does my hon. Friend agree that Scotland and her access to North sea oil and gas will play a crucial role in safeguarding the United Kingdom's energy security as we transition to a greener future?

**Iain Stewart:** I agree that we must do all we can to end Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. The North sea has a crucial role to play in that as we transition to cleaner energy sources in the longer run. The Government remain committed to the domestic offshore oil and gas sector, which will continue to keep people warm and strengthen the security of supply.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Scotland has a quarter of Europe's marine energy potential, but generators in the north of Scotland are charged 15 times the rate to put electricity into the national grid. When will this team, supposedly defending Scotland's interests, actually get that sorted?

**Iain Stewart:** As the hon. Lady knows, that is a matter for Ofgem, which is currently conducting a review into that.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Too often, key Scottish energy projects, such as the Acorn Project in the north-east, get overlooked by this UK Government. If we look further east, the port of Nigg will provide the UK's only offshore wind turbine manufacturing facility. It is expanding to be a major energy hub, including green hydrogen production and floating offshore wind assembly. Will the Scottish Secretary and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy visit the port of Nigg to see the massive opportunities there?

**Iain Stewart:** We are committed to developing the renewable energy sector in a whole range of ways. For example, I recently visited the CoRE—Community Renewable Energy—project in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. We are funding that directly through the city and growth deal project. I am more than happy to visit Nigg and any other centre in Scotland that is developing that technology. We are standing four-square behind it.

#### Improving Union Connectivity

4. **Robin Millar** (Aberconwy) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving Union connectivity. [900003]

6. **Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving Union connectivity. [900005]

7. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to improve transport connectivity between Scotland and England. [900006]

8. **Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Ind): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving Union connectivity. [900007]

11. **Dehenna Davison** (Bishop Auckland) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving Union connectivity. [900010]

15. **Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving Union connectivity. [900014]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack):** The UK Government are carefully considering the recommendations set out in Sir Peter Hendy's Union connectivity review. My hon. Friend Baroness Vere, the Minister responsible for Union connectivity, has discussed the UCR recommendations with Graeme Dey MSP, the former Scottish Government Transport Minister. Sadly, Mr Dey has since stepped down for health reasons. In February, we first requested a meeting with his replacement, Jenny Gilruth. We hope to meet Ms Gilruth as soon as her busy diary allows.

**Robin Millar:** It is regrettable that the Scottish Government refuse to engage with the UK connectivity review. It is also notable that serious concerns remain, even now, about the award management and delivery of

the Ferguson ferries contract. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Scottish Government need to up their game in connecting UK residents?

**Mr Jack:** Yes, and to clarify my hon. Friend's point, the Scottish Government did refuse to engage with the Union connectivity review, in the form of Cabinet Secretary Michael Matheson telling his civil servants not to communicate with Sir Peter Hendy, so my hon. Friend makes a very good point. Scottish National party MPs are only too keen to tell us when the Scottish Government are doing well, how great they are and why the UK Government should follow suit. However, when it comes to ferry contracts, the SNP has shown startling incompetence: they are five years late in delivery and £150 million over budget. Despite the Scottish Government's incompetence, this Government stand ready to work with them on improving transport links across the United Kingdom, because we believe that that is best for all.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I have taken the west coast main line a couple of times from Preston to Glasgow, which is a wonderful city. It hosted the busy COP26, with its wonderful work, and there is the space industry in Glasgow. However, the train line is absolutely vital. As part of my right hon. Friend's Union connectivity review, will he make sure that travel from Preston and the other connecting stations to Glasgow is easier and better?

**Mr Jack:** High Speed 2 will transform rail travel in this country. It will build opportunity and boost the economy through national regeneration and the widespread creation of jobs. HS2 will go to Preston from the moment that it opens for operation. That means that facilities at Preston will be upgraded, including a new platform that will also see a direct HS2 service from Birmingham, increasing the frequency of connections to the UK's major economic centres.

**Rachael Maskell:** Turning to the east, better connectivity strengthens the economy and strengthens opportunity—Labour's twin ambitions for Scotland. With York having such a pivotal role on the whole network, what discussions is the Secretary of State having about investing in rail north of York to ensure that connectivity right into the heart of Scotland?

**Mr Jack:** The hon. Lady and I share exactly the same ambition: faster rail to York, which will mean faster rail to Scotland.

**Rob Roberts:** Having spent a wonderful weekend in Glasgow and visited the wonderful Rowallan castle in the constituency of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) for a wedding, I completely agree that the scenery and tourism in Scotland should be enjoyed by everybody in the United Kingdom. Can my right hon. Friend confirm what discussions he has had with Ministers in the Department for Transport about enacting all the recommendations in Sir Peter's review? Can he confirm a timeline for when that might be likely to occur?

**Mr Jack:** The Prime Minister has welcomed—indeed, intends to accept—the proposals for the creation of UKNET, a strategic transport network spanning the



entire United Kingdom. The funding that the UK Government have set aside will put us on the right path to developing the best infrastructure investment options to strengthen our main transport arteries for people and businesses across the United Kingdom.

**Dehenna Davison:** The A68 is one of the main arteries for traffic crossing the border of England and Scotland, carrying thousands of vehicles each way every day. Many pass through the small village of Toft Hill in my constituency. In 2021, the Government finally announced that they would be providing funding to finally complete the much-awaited Toft Hill bypass—*[Interruption]*—improving the safety of roads for all users, including those travelling into England from Scotland. Does the Secretary of State agree that that demonstrates the Government's commitment to bringing the nations of our UK together by ensuring that the infrastructure works not only for both nations, but for local communities?

**Mr Jack:** I notice that my hon. Friend was being rudely interrupted, but what I think I picked up was that the A68 from Darlington to Midlothian is of great importance to cross-border transport connectivity between England and Scotland. I extend my congratulations to Durham County Council for its success in the levelling-up fund. The rerouting of the A68 at Toft Hill will create a new 1.6 km bypass away from the village centre, which I know my hon. Friend has been campaigning tirelessly for.

**Mark Jenkinson:** Will my right hon. Friend set out his assessment of the impact of devolution on Union connectivity?

**Mr Jack:** Sir Peter Hendy noted in his final report that

“devolution has been good for transport”.

However, he identified that it has none the less led to

“a gap in UK-wide strategic transport planning that has resulted in cross-border schemes...seeming to be a lower priority than other schemes which may provide greater local benefit.”

Through the implementation of UKNET, we are committed to forging and strengthening transport bonds and creating a better-connected United Kingdom.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I do not think the Scottish Government need to take lessons in ferries from a Government who awarded a massive ferry contract to a company that did not even have a boat, but we will leave that to one side just now.

The Secretary of State was kind enough to mention my constituency colleague Jenny Gilruth. Jenny Gilruth has something in common with every single constituency MSP ever elected in Fife: she is not a Conservative. The Conservatives have never won a Scottish Parliament seat in Fife, and its last Conservative Member in this place lost his seat in 1987. In wards entirely within my constituency, the Conservatives managed one councillor, compared with eight from the SNP. Given the very clear expression of anti-Tory sentiment in Fife through the years, what makes the Secretary of State think that he knows Fife's transport needs better than our local constituency MSP?

**Mr Jack:** The hon. Gentleman misses the very important point that Ms Gilruth is the Transport Minister. We want Scotland's two Governments to work together, and we believe that if the Scottish Government engage with us, we can work on ways to improve the highways for everyone.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I am here today in the House of Commons, but my heart is in Seville. I thank the Secretary of State for his contribution and wish Rangers, the most successful football club in the world, every success tonight.

In conjunction with his Cabinet colleagues, will he ensure that the connectivity review and levelling up lead to benefits right across the entirety of the United Kingdom?

**Mr Jack:** That is absolutely our intention. I visited Belfast recently to have discussions about connectivity and how we can upgrade the A77 and the A75, and we now want to work with the Scottish Government to achieve that and many other improvements.

### Cost of Living

**5. Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on tackling rises in the cost of living. [900004]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart):** We have regular discussions with the Scottish Government. The Chancellor has already announced £22 billion of support measures, including a tax cut for 2.4 million Scottish workers, worth more than £330 a year for a typical employee. We are committed to financially supporting Scotland. The record block grant of about £41 billion for the next three years enables the Scottish Government to take necessary steps.

**Gavin Newlands:** While energy costs are skyrocketing under this Government, the Scottish Government are helping to decarbonise the heating of 1 million homes and saving families money while driving the net zero transition. At the same time, households are being hit by record fuel prices. Where they have powers, the Scottish Government are doing what they can by funding record investment in electric vehicle infrastructure and active travel, massively outstripping the UK Government. Why will this Government not match Scotland's ambitions to drive the move to net zero and reduce living costs for families?

**Iain Stewart:** Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that the measures to which he refers are in part possible because of the record funding that this Government are giving the Scottish Government. Let me also point to the measures that the Chancellor has announced to help with insulation, including the reduction in VAT on house-warming measures.

**Mr Speaker:** I now call the shadow Secretary of State, Ian Murray.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Let me first join the Secretary of State in wishing Rangers football club all the very best in Seville tonight—although I wish

them no luck whatsoever for the Scottish cup final on Saturday, when they will play the famous Heart of Midlothian FC.

The Cabinet was asked for ideas on how to deal with the cost of living crisis. So far, we have had “Take on more hours”, “Get a better job”, “MOT your car every two years”, “Buy supermarket branded food”, and even “Learn to cook”, but all that the Chancellor has delivered is “Give taxpayers a loan of their own money to pay their bills.” Although oil and gas company profits are more than the combined increase in everyone’s energy bills, the Government are rejecting Labour’s plan to give all households up to £600 off their energy bills with a one-off windfall tax on those profits. Can the Minister tell us what the Scotland Office team’s contribution has been to these ideas, and which of those ludicrous ideas he favours the most?

**Iain Stewart:** I should begin by saying to the hon. Gentleman that the colour of my tie in no way diminishes my support for Rangers in Seville tonight.

As I have said, the Chancellor has already announced £22 billion of support. That includes 5p off a litre of fuel, £150 council tax rebates, and the hardship fund for local authorities, which gives support to the families experiencing the most difficulties. We have made it clear that the windfall tax to which the hon. Gentleman refers is not a simple solution to every problem—we have to think carefully about what it would mean for investment and jobs, and for our transition to clean energy—and the Chancellor made it clear yesterday that he wants the oil and gas companies to invest their profits in those schemes, and if they do not do so, no option is off the table.

**Ian Murray:** That is simply not good enough from this Government. Inflation is at a 40-year high, but in reality, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies this morning, it is much higher for most families. There is the weekly shop, the energy bill, petrol for the car, and taxes all rising to the extent that 150,000 more Scots cannot pay their bills, and today—in 2022—too many children are going to bed hungry or cold or both. The Chancellor keeps saying that he “stands ready to act”, but refuses to deliver an emergency Budget. His actions so far have raised taxes to their highest level in 70 years and dropped living standards by the largest amount since the 1950s.

Scotland has two Governments making decisions that are compounding the cost of living crisis. Can the Minister tell us what he is doing to get the Chancellor to act, if he is not acting now?

**Iain Stewart:** I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that the inflationary pressures are global, resulting from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and other global supply chain problems. This is not an issue unique to the United Kingdom. I have already said that the Chancellor has delivered £22 billion of support for the people of this country; he is keeping a very close eye on the situation, and will intervene where necessary. I should also draw attention to his record during the pandemic, when he stepped in at the right points to support those people.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the SNP spokesperson, Mhairi Black.

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs advised people in poverty to buy value products, the safeguarding Minister suggested that people should just work “more hours” or get a “better-paid job”, and the Chancellor said that it would be “silly” to help people struggling with the cost of living crisis. Does the Minister have any equally useless advice to add to that of his colleagues for the people facing destitution?

**Iain Stewart:** I have already pointed out that the Chancellor has given £22 billion-worth of support to the people of this country. He is keeping a close eye on the situation and will step in when necessary. If the hon. Lady is that concerned about the cost of living in Scotland, I would point out that her Government in Edinburgh have a higher tax rate than here in the rest of the UK.

**Mhairi Black:** Apart from the fact that that is not true, let me say that the Scottish Government have already spent over £1 billion mitigating the worst of Tory cuts. We are investing £770 million per year in the cost of living crisis, increasing Scottish benefits by 6%, doubling the Scottish child payment and mitigating the bedroom tax. Does the Minister not agree that it is about time his Department lifted a finger?

**Iain Stewart:** My Department is providing the Scottish Government with a record level of support—£41 billion. That is helping them to deliver the policies that the hon. Lady refers to. They might be able to do more if they had not wasted hundreds of millions of pounds on ferries that do not work, or on the First Minister’s independence revival tour of the United States.

**Mr Speaker:** Before we come to Prime Minister’s questions, I would like to point out the British Sign Language interpretation of the proceedings is available to watch on [parliamentlive.tv](https://parliamentlive.tv).

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*  
**Engagements**

Q1. [900086] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 18 May.

**The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson):** I know that Members across the House will want to join me in offering our best wishes to Rangers for this evening’s match in Seville. This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

**Steve McCabe:** The latest “State of Ageing” report reveals that last year in this country, 9,000 people over the age of 60 died because their homes were too cold. Will the Prime Minister give a guarantee that that figure will be lower, not higher, this time next year?

**The Prime Minister:** I think everybody has every sympathy with people who are facing difficulties with the cost of heating. That is why the Government have stepped up with an extra £9.1 billion in addition to what we are doing with the cold weather payments and the warm home allowance, and we will continue to support people throughout the aftershocks of covid, just as we did throughout the pandemic.

**Q2. [900087] Elliot Colburn** (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): Figures released from the Department for Education show that last year, once again, Lib Dem-run Sutton Council became the highest rejecter of children applying for education, health and care assessments in the country. Nearly half the children were rejected, compared with the national average of just 23%. Can the Prime Minister outline how the special educational needs and disability review will help children with special educational needs and their families to get access to the education that they deserve?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, indeed. I thank my hon. Friend very much for his campaign, and he is completely right. That is why we have a SEND review, and we will ensure that SEND children and young people can get access to the right support at the right place and at the right time across the country.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the Leader of the Opposition, Keir Starmer.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I, too, send my best wishes to Rangers. It has been quite an extraordinary story for that football club over the last few years.

A one-off tax on huge oil and gas profits would raise billions of pounds and cut energy bills across the country. The Chancellor rightly says there are two camps on this: you are either for it or you are against it. But in which camp does the Chancellor put himself? He says neither. Well, I am in favour of it. This is the question for the Prime Minister: is he for it, is he against it or is he sitting on the fence like his Chancellor?

**The Prime Minister:** I remind the House that the right hon. and learned Gentleman struggled to define what a woman is. If he cannot make up his mind on that point, heaven help us. This Government are not, in principle, in favour of higher taxation; of course not. Labour loves it. They love putting up taxes. Dogs bark, cats miaow and Labour puts up taxes. What we want to do is take a sensible approach, governed by the impact on investment and jobs. That is the test of a strong economy, and it is by having a strong economy that we will be able to look after people, as we did during covid and as we will in the aftershocks of covid. I am proud to say it was revealed this week that unemployment has come down to the lowest level since 1974. I do not know how old he was, but I was 10 years old.

**Keir Starmer:** Hang on; last week the Prime Minister said he will have a look at the idea, and yesterday he voted against it. Anyone picking up the papers today would think the Government are for it, and now he says he is against it again. Clear as mud. To be fair, it is not like the rest of the Cabinet know what they think, either. On the same day, the Chancellor said it was

something he is looking at and the Justice Secretary said it would be “disastrous.” The Business Secretary called it a “bad idea,” but he also said he would consider a Spanish-style windfall tax. One minute they are ruling it in, and the next they are ruling it out. When will the Prime Minister stop the hokey-cokey and just back Labour’s plan for a windfall tax to cut household bills?

**The Prime Minister:** Labour’s plan, always and everywhere, is to raise taxes on business. I remember the right hon. and learned Gentleman campaigning in 2019 on the biggest taxes for business that this country has ever seen. That is their instinct. This country and the world face problems with the cost of energy, driven partly by covid and partly by Putin’s war of choice in Ukraine. We always knew there would be a short-term cost in weening ourselves off Putin’s hydrocarbons and in sanctioning the Russian economy. Everybody in this House voted for those sanctions. We knew it would be tough, but giving in and not sticking the course would ultimately be a far greater economic risk. Of course we will look at all the measures we need to take to get people through to the other side, but the only reason we can do that is because we took the tough decisions that were necessary during the pandemic, which would not have been possible if we had listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

**Keir Starmer:** He just doesn’t get it, does he? He doesn’t actually understand what working families are going through in this country. They are struggling with how they are going to pay their bills. While he dithers, British households are slapped with an extra £53 million on their energy bills every single day. Meanwhile, every single day, North sea oil and gas giants rake in £32 million in unexpected profits. Does he not see that, every single day he delays his inevitable U-turn—he is going to do it—he is choosing to let people struggle when they do not need to?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that this Government have no sympathy for people who are struggling and working. Let me tell him what we are already doing. We are already spending £22 billion. We are already helping people with the cost of living in any way that we can, but the reason why we can do that is that we took the tough decisions to get this country through covid, to make sure that we came out of lockdown in the way that was necessary, and to have a strong economy with robust employment growth. We will continue—[*Interruption.*] He talks about cutting taxes. In July, we will have the biggest tax cut for 10 years: £330 in cuts, on average, for 30 million people who are paying national insurance contributions. The reason why we can do that is that we have a strong and robust economy. I am going to look at all measures in future to support our people—of course I am—but the only reason why we can do that, and why our companies are in such robust health, is because of the decisions this Government have taken.

**Keir Starmer:** The Prime Minister is still pretending the economy is booming. He still has his head in the sand, in the middle of an economic crisis. He keeps saying that more help is coming, but we have heard it all before. On 13 May, he stood there and said,

“We will do more right now.”



A week has passed, and there has been nothing. On 19 April, he stood there and said:

“we will do more as soon as we can”.—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 60.]

A month has passed, and still nothing. The Chancellor said, “Wait until the autumn.” At least he is honest that the plan is to do nothing. Does the Prime Minister not realise that working people across the country cannot afford to wait while he vacillates? It is time to make his mind up.

**The Prime Minister:** I will tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman what has happened in the past month. We have got 300,000 more people off welfare and into work, on our Way to Work programme. It is because we get people into work that those families, those people, are £6,000 a year better off. It is by getting people into work that we fix the long-term problems of this economy. His answer, in addition to putting up taxes, is to borrow more—we heard it from the shadow Chancellor this morning. She says she wants to borrow almost another £30 billion; that is what she says. Do Members know what that means? It means more pressure on interest rates. It means pressure on mortgages. It means pressure on every family—on every man, woman and child—in this country. That is Labour economic policy. That is why there has never been a Labour Government who left office with unemployment lower than when they came in—that is the reality.

**Keir Starmer:** On the day when inflation went to 9%—the highest rate for 40 years—the least the watching public can expect is a Prime Minister who concentrates on the cost of living crisis. Clearly, he just cannot make his mind up, so let us have a look at who is for this and who is against it. On one side, we have the chair of Tesco; the chair of John Lewis; the Chair of the Treasury Committee; the Chair of the Education Committee; Lord Hague; and Lord Browne, the old chief executive officer of BP. They all support a windfall tax. Even the current boss of BP says a windfall tax would not discourage investment. On the other side, we have the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who, when he is not sticking notes on people’s desks like some overgrown prefect, is dead set against it. When is the Prime Minister finally going to get a grip, stand up for the people of Britain and get on the right side of the argument?

**The Prime Minister:** Nothing could be more transparent from this exchange than Labour’s lust to raise taxes on business. We do not relish it. We do not want to do it. Of course we do not want to do it; we believe in jobs, in investment and in growth. As it happens, the oil companies concerned are on track to invest about £70 billion into our economy over the next few years, and they are already taxed at a rate of 40%. What we want to see is investment in the long-term energy provision of our country; Labour has signally failed to do this, cancelling our nuclear power investment. The people suffering from high energy prices in this country today have previous Labour Governments to blame for that mistake. Of course we will look at all sensible measures, but we will be driven by considerations of growth, investment and employment. I just remind the House that unemployment has now hit a record low—or for 50 years, I should say—and half a million more people are now in payroll employment than before the pandemic began.

**Keir Starmer:** So the Prime Minister is on the side of excess profits for oil and gas companies; we are on the side of working people—there you have it. He clearly does not like me pushing him on this, but the reason why I keep coming back to this subject, and why it is so frustrating that he has not acted, is that so many people are living through this nightmare and feel totally abandoned by their Government.

This week, I spoke to Phoenix Halliwell. A rare kidney condition means that Phoenix has to do dialysis from home, from 10 pm to 7 am, five days a week, just so he can take his daughter Rosie to school. His dialysis is life-saving, so he cannot turn it off. Even though his wife, who is a midwife in the NHS, works extra shifts, during the winter they had to turn their central heating off, and Phoenix skips meals to make ends meet, but their energy bill has still doubled. Phoenix says he feels like he is being “priced out of existence.” And it is not just him: millions of our disabled, elderly and vulnerable neighbours are at the sharp end of this crisis. They simply cannot afford to live with dignity.

The decisions we make here matter. The cost of indecision is enormous. People across the country need action now. The plans are already there; Prime Minister, stop the delay and work with us to put them in place. Do it for households that face bills they cannot afford, and do it for Phoenix, who simply cannot afford to wait.

**The Prime Minister:** I would be grateful if the right hon. and learned Gentleman could send me the details of that sad case. The NHS does cover the costs of those who are on dialysis. By the way, the Opposition voted against the vital investment in the NHS that this country needs.

I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and the House, of the key point: none of this is possible—the investment in the NHS is not possible, the £22 billion that we have already put in is not possible and the further investment we are going to put in is not possible—without the strong economy that this Government have delivered. It is because we took the tough decisions that I have mentioned that we have record low unemployment—or a record low for the last 50 years. The Queen’s Speech that we have been debating is about putting in the infrastructure, skills and technology that will continue to build the platform for growth and jobs in this country. That is what this Government are committed to doing and that is the best way out of economic problems.

By the way, I thought it was fantastic to see Her Majesty the Queen open Crossrail. That has already delivered 72,000 jobs and will produce £90 billion for the whole of the UK economy. Let me ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman: who was the Mayor of London when Crossrail was first starting to be built? And who was the Prime Minister who completed it? We get the big things done. There has never been a Labour Government who left office with unemployment lower than when they began.

**Q3. [900088] Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con):** I thank the Prime Minister for visiting us in Leyland a couple of weeks ago. As he knows, when we knock on doors, we find that crime and antisocial behaviour is a big issue for people locally, and part of the problem is that when the local police are required to respond to

calls, they have to come in from Preston or lovely Chorley. Now that Lancashire has 314 more police officers—thanks to this Government—does the Prime Minister agree that we need to use some of them to get Leyland police response open? Will he work with me, the fabulous local police and the police and crime commissioner to make that happen?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is a fantastic campaigner for her constituency, as I discovered just the other day. We are recruiting more police officers: 300 more in Lancashire and 13,576 more across the whole of the country. I would of course be happy to arrange the relevant meeting so that we can continue to drive neighbourhood crime—which is already down 33%—down even further.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I am sure the whole House will want to join me in wishing Glasgow Rangers Football Club all the best in the final tonight. It is always a joy to see Scottish clubs get to the finals of European competitions.

People did not need to see this morning's official statistics to know that we are experiencing the highest inflation in 40 years. They know it because they are living with it. Families cannot afford food; they cannot pay their bills—and we are only at the beginning. As always, under the Tories, the poorest are punished the most. For months, people have been crying out for support, but, month after month, a distracted Downing Street has failed to lift a finger to help. Does the Prime Minister still support his Chancellor's insulting statement that acting now in this cost of living emergency would just be "silly"?

**The Prime Minister:** I support the Chancellor's work in lifting the living wage by a record amount, in making sure that people on universal credit pay £1,000 less in tax, in putting another £22 billion into supporting people with the cost of living, and in giving £9.1 billion already to help with the cost of energy. Above all, I support what he has done to deliver a strong economic foundation that makes all that possible.

**Ian Blackford:** My goodness, talk about an Aesop's fable! Every day that this Prime Minister remains out of touch, people remain out of pocket. By the way, Prime Minister, £20 a week was taken out of people's universal credit.

The Prime Minister has just confirmed that he does think it would be "silly" to intervene. The Tories' only response to this cost of living crisis has been insults and inaction. We have the Tory Back Bencher who thinks that poor people just need cooking lessons, the Tory Minister who thinks that people should just get a "better paid job", and the Chancellor who thinks it would be "silly" to act now. This is the cost of living crisis from Westminster. For weeks, the Prime Minister has been briefing that it is the Treasury that is to blame for blocking financial support for struggling families. Well, Prime Minister, it is time to stop sniping from the sidelines. If this Chancellor will not deliver an emergency budget, it is time for the Prime Minister to sack the Treasury, to sack the Chancellor, and to put somebody else in office who will act.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman needs to understand. To get back to the crucial point, we have been through covid, and we are facing a spike in global energy prices which has been greatly exacerbated by what Putin is doing in Ukraine. To deal with that, we are putting billions and billions—already £9.1 billion—into supporting people with the cost of energy, cutting fuel duty by record sums, and helping elderly people in all sorts of ways, not least through local councils, with another £1 billion. Everybody in the country knows, though, that we are not through this yet, and everybody can see that. They all know that the Government are going to do more, but they also know that the only reason that we can do so is that, crucially, we have a strong economy with massively high employment figures. That would not have been possible if we had listened to Opposition Members.

**Q4. [900089] Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware of my campaign to have digitally altered images carry a label. Last week was Mental Health Awareness Week. There are 1.25 million people with eating disorders and 1 million people using steroids. Eighty-four Members of this House from seven parties signed my open letter to companies asking them to pledge not to alter their images in their adverts. Will the Prime Minister support that pledge? For those who do not take that pledge, will he vow to make sure that we consider labelling digitally altered images where body proportions are affected?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his fantastic campaign. He and I have talked about it at length. Clearly, there is a risk to mental health as young people are given unrealistic expectations about how they should look because of the stuff that they see. His kitemark suggestion is extremely useful, and I will make sure that we follow it up as part of our mental health plan.

**Ed Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): May I join other new fans of Rangers and wish them good luck in Seville tonight?

British farmers are the best in the world. They could play a big part in the answer to how families and pensioners can put food on the table during the cost of living emergency. But from Caithness to Cumbria, from Shropshire to Devon, farmers' input costs are spiralling upwards: animal feed is up 60% and fertiliser prices have more than doubled. Yet instead of helping Britain's own food producers the Government are slashing the support payments that farmers rely on, sometimes for up to 50% of their income, even before a new scheme is in place. Will the Prime Minister meet me and farming leaders to understand the extreme challenges they are facing, so that our farmers can do their bit to help families and pensioners to afford to put food on the table during this economic crisis?

**The Prime Minister:** I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that I do recognise the challenges that farmers are facing with the cost of their inputs in fuel and fertiliser. That is why we are working so hard to abate those costs—not just cutting duty, but doing everything else we can to ensure that we fix the energy crisis. What we are also doing is championing UK food and farming, which has fantastic export markets around the world

and now has 73 trade deals to exploit in a world avid, as he rightly says, for delicious, wholesome and nutritious UK food and drink. I would be very happy to organise the relevant meeting with him.

**Q7.** [900092] **Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking my Hertford and Stortford constituents who are offering help and refuge to Ukrainians suffering from and fleeing the Russian invasion? Will he also set out how his visit to Sweden and Finland ensured closer co-operation with our allies to secure the long-term stability and security of Europe, as my constituents are rightly concerned about ongoing Russian aggression?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend's constituents very much for what they are doing to help Ukrainians fleeing war and aggression. I know that Members up and down the country have constituents who are being incredibly generous; I think we can all be proud of the UK's efforts. Yes, it is true that the UK signed historic declarations the other day with Sweden and Finland to reinforce our mutual security and to fortify Europe's defences. That has been a massive step change in our co-operation, a thoroughly good thing, and it has been driven in the cases of both Sweden and Finland by the people themselves, who see the logic of NATO membership.

**Q5.** [900090] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): The Home Office, the Department of Health and Social Care and others now regularly take six months to respond to letters to Ministers. People with immigration cases wait years to hear anything at all. However, instead of putting resources into fixing this unacceptable problem, the Prime Minister is choosing to fire thousands of civil servants, and his Minister is wandering around Whitehall putting Post-it notes on desks that he thinks look too empty. Will the Prime Minister personally look into this issue and instruct his Ministers and civil servants to give our constituents the attention they deserve?

**The Prime Minister:** I must respectfully disagree with the implication for the civil service that working from home is everywhere as productive as being in the office. I simply do not accept that. I think we will become more productive and more efficient if, on the whole, we find ways to get back to our desks.

**Q8.** [900093] **Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): Following my campaign, Witton-le-Wear Primary School is now being granted 350 grand for improvement works by Durham County Council—the only time this has happened, after Labour lost control of the council for the first time in over 100 years last year. Villa Real School, Leadgate Primary School and Consett Junior School in North West Durham are also going to be applying for the condition improvement fund. Can I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that those cases are taken as seriously as possible? Does he, more broadly, agree that education is a cornerstone of levelling up, as is ensuring that more good jobs are available locally in County Durham too, so that it is more than just a place to bring friends for a social evening of beer and takeaway curry, and an even better place to live, work and bring up a family?

**The Prime Minister** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, Prime Minister. I have got a real problem. Some people are not going to get in. Have we seen the time now, and we are only on question 16? I want everybody to help each other so that we can speed up and we might get a few more in.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend, who is a massive champion for his constituency of North West Durham. I am delighted that he has been a supporter of County Durham's city of culture bid—culture in its widest interpretation. I support him in everything he does.

**Q6.** [900091] **Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): I am sure the Prime Minister knows that this is Dementia Action Week, and I am proud that the UK Dementia Research Institute now calls Wales home. In 2019, the Tory manifesto promised to double funding for dementia research, but the researchers are still waiting for this money. So can the Prime Minister tell me, in Dementia Action Week, when the dementia moonshot will be delivered?

**The Prime Minister:** We intend fully to deliver the dementia moonshot, but never forget that Labour was the party that voted against £13 billion a year extra for the NHS.

**Q9.** [900094] **Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): I know that I am not alone in dealing with many constituents facing delays to renewing their passports and driving licences. In Gedling, there have been cases of family reunions in jeopardy and drivers nearly having job offers withdrawn because of delays to renewals. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that everything possible is being done in Government to address this problem so that we can get the good folk of Gedling back on the road and away for their holidays?

**The Prime Minister:** I am told that driving licences are now being issued faster than they were. I am also told that there are no delays in successful online driving licence applications and that customers should receive their licence within a few days. If I am misinformed about that, I trust that my hon. Friend will let me know.

**Q10.** [900095] **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Prime Minister, food prices are going up, rents are going up and energy costs are going up. Every day, I have more and more constituents coming to me to say they thought the day would never come—things just cost too much. At the same time, people are anchored to the minimum wage, working two, three, four or five jobs on low wages with in-work benefits. They just cannot afford it. At the same time, we have a Minister, the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), saying that to survive they should take on more hours or get a better job. Does the Prime Minister agree with his Minister, or does he agree with me that we should have an emergency Budget?

**The Prime Minister:** I accept that of course there are economic pressures on our country now caused by the factors that we have mentioned, but that is why we have already increased the minimum wage by £1,000 per year for those who are on it, already increased universal credit by £1,000 a year, and all the other measures—billions



and billions of tax that we are putting into supporting incomes. The reason we can do that is that we have strong economic fundamentals, with unemployment—I do not know when the hon. Gentleman was born—at the lowest it has been since 1974. That is giving us the foundation to take our country forward.

**Q11. [900096] Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con):** Airedale General Hospital recently submitted its bid to be one of the Government's new hospitals. This is because the Airedale has an extremely high structural risk profile, with 83% of the building being constructed from aerated concrete. Several wards are closed due to structural risk. The hospital is now over 20 years beyond its original life expectancy. So can the Prime Minister personally assure me that we will be able to deliver a new Airedale hospital that is fit for the future?

**The Prime Minister:** There is a lot of pressure on me to dish out yet another hospital from this Dispatch Box. But I can tell my hon. Friend that we are reviewing all applications for the next eight hospitals in our new hospital programme, which is the biggest in a generation. That is only possible because we have a strong economy. My hon. Friend is a doughty campaigner for his constituents. We will make a final decision later this year.

**Q12. [900097] Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP):** On 26 February, a private charter flight to Moscow was allowed to take off from Inverness airport, in an apparent breach of a UK ban on flights of that nature that had come into effect from midnight the day before. Air traffic control transcripts published this week in the *Press and Journal* newspaper have revealed that, despite being informed of the intended flight, no attempt was made by the UK Government or their agencies to prevent the plane from taking off. Will the Prime Minister commit to informing the House at the earliest opportunity who was travelling on that flight? Why, despite being informed in advance of the flight, was no attempt made by the UK Government to keep the plane on the ground? What will the Prime Minister personally do to try to prevent any similar breaches of sanctions from happening?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not know the answer to the hon. Member's question, but as soon as we can get some information about that, I will make sure that the House is properly informed.

**Q13. [900098] Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con):** Earlier this week, the Planning Inspectorate waved through a decision by Labour councillors to build a massive logistics hub in south Warrington. The plans are contrary to national policy, entirely in the green belt and have been approved despite more than 1,000 letters of objection. Does the Prime Minister

agree that listening to local communities and protecting our precious green belt must be at the heart of planning policy? Will he meet me to see how local residents can have their voices heard?

**The Prime Minister:** Local residents could have no more powerful voice than that of my hon. Friend. The House will have heard him loud and clear. I know that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will have heard him loud and clear and will make sure that he gets the relevant meeting.

**Q14. [900099] Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP):** Mr Speaker,

“no bullying and no harassment; no leaking...No misuse of taxpayer money and no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The precious principles of public life enshrined in this document...must be honoured at all times”.

Those are the Prime Minister's own words from the ministerial code. Can the Prime Minister tell me, on a scale of one to 10, how he is doing on keeping to those principles?

**The Prime Minister:** It is 10 out of 10, because we believe in this Government in adhering to the principles of the ministerial code. By the way, and this is an important point, because there are a lot of attacks on MPs and on what goes on in this place, it is always worth stressing that the vast majority of people who work in the House of Commons—Members of Parliament—are doing a very good job and working very hard and are not misbehaving.

**Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con):** Thirsk and Malton has welcomed asylum seekers from all parts of the world, including Syria and Ukraine, but the Government have just announced that, starting from 31 May, up to 1,500 non-detained young, single males from different parts of the world— asylum seekers—will be kept on a base at the centre of a small rural village of 600 people—a village of children all the way through to elderly residents. That is a village without streetlights and without police presence. It will devastate the community. It will devastate house prices, which will plummet, and the residents of that village will not feel safe to leave their homes alone. Will my right hon. Friend please, on behalf of the community, stop these plans?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend very much, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is engaging with him and others locally about the use of the site. I hear loud and clear what he has had to say. Indeed, I am the recipient of many of his intercessions on this matter, and I understand the strength of feeling in his constituency. I am sure there will be further meetings between him and the Home Office about what we can do.



## Foreign National Offender Removal Flights

12.39 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Tom Pursglove):** Foreign criminals who abuse our hospitality by committing serious and violent crimes such as murder and rape should be in no doubt of this Government's determination to deport them. The British people have shown repeatedly at the ballot box that they want an immigration system that is firm and fair. Our new plan for immigration, underpinned by the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, is the first major reform of the system in decades. With that Act now law, we are getting on with the job and operationalising the plan.

It is this Conservative Government who are delivering on the will of the British people. Making our streets safer is our priority. That is why we introduced the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, giving the police the powers they need to crack down on violent criminals. It is also why, despite the challenges of covid, we stepped up the removal of criminals who have no right to be here. Since January 2019, over 10,000 foreign national offenders have been removed from the United Kingdom. In the last month alone, flights have left to Albania, Romania, Poland and Lithuania and now, this morning, to Jamaica—a flight I expect to land while I am on my feet.

It was under a Labour Government that the UK Borders Act 2007 was introduced and passed requiring a deportation order to be made where a foreign national has been convicted of an offence in the UK and sentenced to 12 months or more, unless an exception applies. We apply that law, but it is Labour MPs who now howl, time and again imploring us to halt the removal of dangerous foreign criminals from our streets with letters, questions to Parliament and campaigns on Twitter. We have even seen members of the shadow Cabinet defending criminals, with no consideration for the victims or their loved ones. Too often, Opposition MPs are ignoring the law-abiding majority and, by extension, standing on the side of criminals, including paedophiles, murderers and rapists.

Let me set out some facts of the flight that departed this morning, because I know this is of real interest to many Members of this House. First, the offences committed by individuals on the flight include rape of a minor, sexual assault against children, firearms offences, dealing and importing controlled drugs, and other violent crimes such as actual bodily harm. Between them, these individuals had a combined total of 58 convictions for 127 offences. These are extremely serious offences, which have a real and lasting impact on victims and communities. They are not minor matters, as some would have people believe.

Secondly, the flight to Jamaica makes up just 1% of total enforced returns in the year ending September 2021. Criminals who have no right to be in the United Kingdom are regularly removed to countries across the world, and we will continue to do this to keep our citizens safe. Public safety is non-negotiable. However, many more criminals could have left the UK today. What we have seen over the last 24 hours is more last-minute claims facilitated by specialist immigration law firms, as well as representations from Opposition MPs to prevent this flight from leaving.

It is no surprise that the Opposition voted against our Nationality and Borders Bill precisely because it seeks to address the merry-go-round of last-minute claims and to speed up the removal of dangerous criminals. Labour Members fought tooth and nail to prevent that Bill from becoming law, and votes have consequences. Convicted criminals guilty of heinous crimes, including manslaughter, rape, robbery, child sex offences, drug offences and violent crime, and persistent offenders remain in our country; had the legislation been passed more quickly, with Opposition support, those individuals might have been removed from the UK today. They remain here, and it is a stain on our country that they do. However, I assure the British people that we are taking action, and things are changing as we get on with delivering our reforms.

I make no apology for removing criminals who have abused our hospitality, broken our laws, and have no right to be here. I make no apology for doing everything in my power to make our streets safer and stand on the side of actual victims. We stand with the British people. It is time that the Opposition tried that as well.

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

12.44 pm

**Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement.

The first duty of the British Government is to keep the British people safe, and the Home Office has a responsibility to make sure that rules are fairly enforced, but Ministers are failing to do so and they are blaming everyone else for their failings. The Home Office must deport dangerous foreign criminals who have no right to be in our country and who should be returned to the country of their citizenship, which is precisely why the last Labour Government introduced stronger laws to that effect. The Home Office also has a responsibility to get its deportation decisions right. As the Government have themselves admitted, during the Windrush scandal the Home Office made grave errors in both detention and deportation decisions, and it is currently failing on all counts.

The Opposition are committed to the principles of an immigration system that is firm, fair and well managed. First and foremost, it is deeply troubling that a number of expert reports over recent years have pointed to how Home Office failures have resulted in fewer foreign criminals being deported than should be the case. Indeed, in 2015, the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration stated that one in three failures to deport foreign criminals was a result of Home Office failure. Fast-forward to 2022, and the latest immigration figures show that the Home Office is still failing miserably in this regard.

Under the current Prime Minister and Home Secretary, there has been a stark decline in the number of foreign national offenders being returned and deported. In the year ending September 2021, 2,732 foreign national offenders were returned from the UK—20% fewer than the previous year and 47% fewer than in 2019, the year before the pandemic began. Foreign national offender returns had already fallen to 5,128 in 2019. Even more staggering is the fact that, according to a 2019 Public Accounts Committee report, the Home Office had to

[Stephen Kinnock]

release six in every 10 migrant detainees whom the Department wanted to deport, and it simply could not explain why this was happening.

The PAC also raised concerns about the need for earlier and better legal advice, which would make it more likely that decisions were accurate and robust, rather than being overturned due to poor decisions later in the process. The Minister will know that the Windrush report identified “low-quality decision-making” and an “irrational...approach to individuals”, and the follow-up report stated that

“there are many examples where the department has not made progress...at all”

on this matter. The level of sheer incompetence is not only a threat to our security; it ultimately erodes the confidence of the British public and foreign nationals alike, because the system fails to fulfil the basic crucial principles of being firm, fair and well managed. The Minister refers to rape, but it is this Government who have presided over rape prosecutions falling to a shameful 1.3%.

The Home Office needs to get this right, but the Minister’s statement was long on bluff and bluster but contained absolutely no substance whatsoever. Perhaps he could therefore answer the following questions: how many foreign offenders have absconded in the last 12 months? What specific steps have been taken to learn the lessons of the Windrush scandal to ensure that this shameful episode is never repeated? Does the Home Office actually have a plan that will address the currently shambolic nature of the deportation system?

The British people deserve better than this. Rather than coming to the Dispatch Box to engage in a frankly rather childish and petulant rant, based on the blame game and finger pointing, the Minister should instead be coming to this Chamber to set out what the Government are actually going to do to fix this broken system.

**Tom Pursglove:** I am grateful to the shadow Minister for his contribution, but let me deal with some facts in responding to it. First, I can be very clear for the House’s benefit that more than 10,000 foreign national offenders have been removed from our country since 2019. [Interruption.] Opposition Members are making lots of gestures, but one thing they will recognise, I am sure, is that we have had a pandemic during the last two years, and I think all Members probably realise and recognise the impact that that has had on business as usual in the returns and deportation space. I can also confirm for the House that the vast majority of removals from our country are to European economic area countries, and of course that applies to enforced returns.

The hon. Member mentioned Windrush. This issue is of course completely unrelated to Windrush. None of those being returned are British citizens or nationals, or members of the Windrush generation. Each person’s return is considered on its individual merits and carefully assessed against a background of relevant case law and in the light of published country information, which covers country-specific issues. The case of each person being returned on a charter to Jamaica is referred to the Windrush taskforce, and it is right and proper that that work is done. I can also add—[Interruption.] Well, it is

right that this is done properly. Legal aid was also raised. Of course, people can access legal support in detention in the usual way.

The Blair and Brown Governments took an entirely pragmatic and eminently sensible approach to these matters. [Interruption.] Well, I give credit where it is due. Opposition Members criticise, but I will give credit to former Labour Home Secretaries who did the right thing and were committed to ensuring that our laws are upheld, and it is the UK Borders Act 2007 that governs this.

Often, the Opposition talk tough on serious violence, but when they have the opportunity they want, entirely optionally, to let out those who have committed serious violence on our streets, when there are options available to remove them from our country. Labour had the opportunity to change things for the better, but oh no, as always they carp from the sidelines but never have a plan.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): My constituents, and I guess most in the United Kingdom, find it unbelievable that convicted murderers, rapists and paedophiles who are foreign national offenders are not returned immediately to their countries. Can the Minister tell us how on earth last-minute appeals can stop people going on flights? Surely we can at least have a cut-off date beyond which no appeals can be made. Maybe he can also tell the House whether he has been on one of these flights and what the atmosphere is like.

**Tom Pursglove:** My hon. Friend and constituency neighbour speaks with great authority on these matters, and I know the view that people in Northamptonshire take on this. I have been on a removal flight to Poland a few months ago, which was a useful experience for me to understand the end-to-end process. I am grateful for his support for the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which introduces the one-stop processes and priority removal notices that should enable us to break this cycle of endless dither and delay, and constant appeals and claims, so that those individuals are removed from our country more quickly. His constituents can be assured that we are getting on with delivering this.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the SNP spokesperson, Stuart C. McDonald.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I, too, thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement, but I do not thank him either for the fact of the statement, which I agree was completely pointless, or for the overblown rhetoric it contained—rhetoric that I more commonly associate with the Minister’s boss than the Minister, who I have a great deal of respect for.

On that note, my first question is, why can we not try to have a sensible, grown-up discussion about this complex policy area? It is frankly nonsense to speak about “sides”. There is a balance to be struck, and it is our responsibility as legislators to debate that sensibly. It is perfectly legitimate for us to question whether the balance is in the right place or to question the disproportionate impact on some communities. As I have pointed out before, in endless urgent questions and on similar topics, Stephen Shaw, the Government-commissioned independent expert, said that the deportation and removal of people brought up here from a young age was “deeply troubling”

and entirely “disproportionate”. Yes, of course many deportations are absolutely justified to protect the public, but it is nonsensical to ignore the fact that some are very cruel, particularly when they relate to people who have lived almost all their lives here and have absolutely no connection to the place they are being deported to.

The Government refuse to acknowledge the fact that these decisions can have profound impacts on the family life of the partners, spouses and children of those being deported, and on others, or that it is legitimate to press the Government on that. So let me try a different argument. If someone has been here since they were in infancy, grew up here, was educated here, commits crime here and is potentially dangerous, why is it fair on the country to which they are deported to have to manage that risk, especially if it is possibly far less equipped to do so, rather than this country, where that person was brought up? The Minister talks about letting people out on to the street, but he is letting people out on the street—just not our streets, but those of another country, with which they have absolutely no connection.

**Tom Pursglove:** What we do as a Government is take responsibility for our returns. We live up to our legal obligations in this space, and that is right and proper, and what the British people expect. But we understandably expect other countries around the world to do the same in taking their immigration offenders and those who have committed criminality in this country and are liable to deportation.

I was slightly surprised to hear the hon. Member say that there has been a lack of interest in these matters in the House. There has been quite a lot of interest, in terms of Twitter commentary and parliamentary questions, and I can certainly vouch for the fact that I have received ministerial correspondence. I also know that Members from across the House have had constituency correspondence on this, so there is certainly interest. On a day when we have had another of these flights—it has attracted considerable media attention, as these matters often do—it is right and proper that I am able to come to the Dispatch Box to set out the steps that the Government are taking. Quite often, Ministers are criticised for not coming to the House to set out such measures. I am here today, I am answering questions from across the House, and I am also here to reassure the British people that we have a plan and we are taking action.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Contrary to the predictable bleating from the Opposition Benches, this is nothing to do with Windrush considerations; the nationality of these individuals is not in question. It is nothing to do with poor prosecution rates; these people have been convicted fairly in a British court. My constituents are sick and tired of this cottage industry of leftie lawyers who are more concerned with keeping serious offenders in the UK than with keeping law-abiding people in the UK safe. Can my hon. Friend tell me the cost of failed deportations, the legal cost of challenges to the UK taxpayer, and the cost of unused tickets for offenders and their chaperones when they are taken off the plane at the last minute—costs that our constituents are having to bear day in, day out?

**Tom Pursglove:** It is fair to say that there are significant costs associated with these removal operations. As I say, with scheduled flights more readily available in the

period ahead relative to the last two years of covid, I hope that it will be easier to facilitate removals from our country more cost-effectively. As a Government, we spend millions of pounds a year dealing with this, but it is right and proper that those with no right to be here and those who commit serious offences on our streets do not remain in the United Kingdom. That is an obligation that we will continue to live up to. As I say, we live up to the requirements of the law on that, as is right and proper, but I will certainly take away my hon. Friend's wider point and gladly share any information that I can about specific costings.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Dame Diana Johnson.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): We all appreciate the need to remove dangerous foreign criminals who present a genuine crime or security risk to our country and should not be here. However, the Government's record on removing foreign criminals has not been good, and to the year ending September 2021 it was at an all-time low. Many have absconded before they could be removed. With the current pressure on the Home Office—including 100,000 asylum claims outstanding, delays in processing Ukraine visas, delays in visas for marriage and work, and problems with processing passport applications—can the Minister confirm that the announced cut of 91,000 civil servants will not apply to the Home Office and that it will have the resources it needs to carry out the work it has to do?

**Tom Pursglove:** I am confident that we will have the resources that we need to deal with these issues, but I can absolutely say to the Chairman of the Select Committee that it does not help our day-to-day immigration work in other parts of the business to have to deal with these constant cycles of claims, appeals and deliberate attempts to frustrate removal. I would be absolutely delighted if we could free up resource in the Home Office to focus on processing other, related claims—in the asylum space, for example, or Ukrainian claims or whatever they are. We would be better placed if we could do that. As I have consistently said, the abuses of our immigration system that we have seen and continue to see make it much harder to get on with the day-to-day business and be as generous as we can be. We are generous, but we could be doing more if the system were in a better place.

**Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we speed up deportations and give effect to the new Rwanda agreement without the twists and tricks of those who put their political preference for uncontrolled, open borders above our country's safety and the safety of those who are considering crossing the channel and putting themselves in the hands of criminal gangs?

**Tom Pursglove:** It is interesting that Ministers are often challenged about our evidence base for wanting to deliver reforms through the new plan for immigration and the Nationality and Borders Act, because the evidence that my hon. Friend points to—she raises these issues consistently—speaks precisely to why the change is necessary and why we are getting on with operationalising the measures in the Act. That work is happening at pace, and we will not waste a moment in bringing that work to fruition.



[Tom Pursglove]

My hon. Friend is right to recognise the challenges that the current situation is presenting, and I am conscious of the impacts on Dover in particular. She does a tremendous job in raising them with Ministers, and I am keen that we continue that dialogue.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I have written to, I think, my third Minister about the case of a person who stabbed a constituent of mine—he wanted to murder her—and is still in the country. If I write to the Minister, will he undertake to look at the case again and ensure that that person is deported so that my constituent can live in peace?

**Tom Pursglove:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising that sensitive issue so constructively. If she shares the details with me, I will gladly look at it. Again, I am determined that the requirements of the Act are upheld, and we as a Government are determined that those with no right to be here should leave our country without delay. Of course, those who have committed serious crimes and are eligible for deportation under the Act should be deported.

**Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): As my hon. Friend is one of the Ministers in Her Majesty's Government most able to give a direct answer to a direct question, does he know how many dangerous foreign national offenders were due to be on the deportation flight this morning and, owing to appeals, how many actually left?

**Tom Pursglove:** It is fair to say that the Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee always asks incisive questions of his witnesses, and he asks an incisive question of me. There is a public interest in explaining to the House the situation that we have seen overnight. I can confirm that the manifest originally had 112 individuals on it; in the end, only seven left our country on the flight.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister will know that in November 2020 the Home Secretary and her team negotiated an agreement with the Government of Jamaica not to remove people who came to the UK under the age of 12, because they believed that we had some responsibility for those whose lives were shaped here. Will the Minister confirm whether that agreement is still in place?

**Tom Pursglove:** We debated these matters in the Nationality and Borders Public Bill Committee. A person's age upon arrival to the UK is not an exception to deportation. The length of time that a person has lived in the UK as well as the strength of their social, cultural and family ties are factors that are considered under the article 8 requirements of the immigration rules. Of course, there is ongoing dialogue with all our returns partners and all such matters are discussed as part of those deliberations and discussions.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The vast majority of the public—and, if truth be known, the vast majority in the House—support what the Minister is doing. The Home Office has a responsibility to keep citizens safe, but does he agree that it also has a responsibility to keep the villagers of Linton-on-Ouse safe, so while it is the right idea, it is entirely the wrong location to put

1,500 young, single men—the vast majority of whom will be law-abiding but some will not—in the middle of a village of 600? Will he look again at the plans and put them on hold until the impact on the community has been properly considered? When the refugee agencies are saying that it is the wrong location, the Home Office must pause, look again and stop the plans completely.

**Tom Pursglove:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue, which is pertinent to his constituency. I know that he and Members on the Government Benches recognise how important it is that we have a more sustainable accommodation model. We cannot continue to spend about £5 million a day on hotel accommodation in the asylum space. That is not acceptable or sustainable, so we must find solutions to that, including through the accommodation centre model that he is aware of. He raised a number of points and I know that ministerial colleagues in the Department are keen to continue to engage with him and work through those issues.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Home Office has had the report that it commissioned from Stephen Shaw on immigration detention since 2018. What progress is it making in relation to the implementation of its recommendations?

**Tom Pursglove:** I will happily write to the right hon. Gentleman with an update on the work that we are doing in detention. Of course, we keep all our facilities, policies and approaches under constant review, reflecting feedback that is received, and I would like to provide him with a full update that touches on all the pertinent and relevant issues, which I cannot do on the Floor of the House.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much welcome the statement. A successful deportation programme requires co-operative recipients. Will he name and shame those countries who are not engaging with the Government's deportation programme—in particular, countries such as Iraq, Iran, Eritrea and Sudan—and say what pressure can be brought to bear on them? Will he consider perhaps denying visas to the nationals of those countries until they engage?

**Tom Pursglove:** My right hon. Friend raised that point eloquently. There is mixed performance in co-operation on removals and deportations from our country. We continue to have constructive discussions with countries around the world about those arrangements. He will also note that, through the Nationality and Borders Act, we have introduced new visa penalty provisions that should help us to drive forward improvements. It is the responsibility of countries around the world to live up to their obligations and accept their returns as the British Government do.

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): Deporting extremely vulnerable people when it could lead them to harm, or even their death, is fundamentally wrong. My constituent's brother has been diagnosed with a severe mental disorder by a consultant psychiatrist. He is in a mental health crisis, and he has attempted suicide. Is the Minister okay to ignore the human rights of extremely vulnerable people in those circumstances?



**Tom Pursglove:** I remind the hon. Member that we live up to our obligations, as is entirely right and proper, including appropriate human rights law and paying due regard to the UK Borders Act 2007. On the specific issue of vulnerabilities, health and wellbeing is taken into consideration, and proper risk assessments are conducted for all those in scope of removal. It is right that we work through individuals' circumstances appropriately—[*Interruption.*]. She can utter that that is not true, but that is a fact.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is outrageous that anyone should conflate the Commonwealth citizens who have come and contributed directly to this country with foreign nationals who have been convicted in our courts of the most serious offences. I find that reprehensible. Will my hon. Friend update the House on the backlog for removing dangerous foreign offenders and the numbers of those in prison now who are likely to be deported at the end of their sentences? Can they be escorted from the prison gates to the plane and flown out of here?

**Tom Pursglove:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the terminology and language used when we debate these issues. It is right that the correct terminology is applied to reflect the relevant circumstances of the individuals and their cases. I give him an absolute assurance that top of my priorities is delivering a quickening of the pace of removing individuals from our country who have no right to be here and deporting foreign criminals. The reforms that we are introducing are pivotal to achieving progress in that regard.

I come at this issue as the victims' Minister, too. When we meet the victims of serious criminality and hear their stories, it is difficult not to be hugely troubled, and the suffering and pain that they feel is only exacerbated if dangerous individuals are in our country when they simply should not be here.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): I believe I heard the Minister right that there was a manifest today with 122 people on it who were to be deported, but that only seven were finally deported. Does that not just point to the incompetence and the problem we have with this Government? How did they get to be on that manifest when they were not ready to be deported?

**Tom Pursglove:** I should correct the hon. Gentleman. The manifest began with 112 people on it and seven ended up on the flight leaving overnight. I think the question his constituents ought to be asking him is this. He complains about problems in the system. He had an opportunity to vote for the solution and consistently refused to do so.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The SNP spokesman said it may be very cruel to deport these criminals who are paedophiles, murderers and rapists, but what is very cruel is the suffering of the victims and their families, and any future victims and their families. Will my hon. Friend tell me what work he is doing with the Ministry of Justice to ensure that processes start while people are in prison, so they can be deported as soon as possible when their sentence finishes?

**Tom Pursglove:** My hon. Friend is right to raise that point. It will of course be known to her that I am a Minister who spans both the Home Office and the

Ministry of Justice. I am having discussions with the Minister with responsibility for prisons on what more we can do to ensure that individuals who should not be in our country are no longer here for any longer than is absolutely necessary, and that we create greater awareness around release from prison, and removal and deportation from our country where appropriate for the circumstances of individual cases.

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): May I say how disrespectful it is that Conservative Members keep talking about lawyers who are, after all, simply protecting people under the laws of this country? It is childish in the extreme that every time we mention that all we hear is, "Lefty lawyers, lefty lawyers." Who cares what their politics are? They protect people according to the law. One of the people who was taken off the flight because they were protected by a lawyer has severe learning disabilities. In his original trial the judge said he was not a ringleader but had in fact been dragged into it by the ringleader, so he should be protected. Does the Minister class him as dangerous? Does he think that the lawyer was wrong? Does he think the law was wrong to allow that man to stay here? Will he join me in condemning these childish attacks on a very proud profession?

**Tom Pursglove:** As I alluded to in answering an earlier question, there is a proper process in place that checks for vulnerability and ensures that those cases are dealt with appropriately. I, of course, think it is right and proper that people have access to legal advice and, of course, the legal profession and due process are absolutely crucial to ensuring that these matters are handled sensitively, appropriately and correctly in accordance with the law. We cannot continue to have a completely unbalanced situation where we see abuses of the system and we see that behaviour rewarded. I have to say to you, Mr Speaker, that my eyes water when I see some of the case studies that are put in front of me and some of the instances we are dealing with in the system. It is not acceptable. It is not okay. There is a need for action and that is why we are taking the steps we are.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): If the Labour party wishes to make the case as to why convicted foreign national rapists and paedophiles should remain in this country they are very welcome to test drive it in my constituency and elsewhere. Meanwhile, does my hon. Friend agree that, although it is absolutely right and fair since we left the European Union that any foreign national with a sentence of over 12 months will be automatically deported, that does, of course, put the emphasis on the Home Office to make sure that its legal ducks are in a row and that the right people are deported?

**Tom Pursglove:** That caseworking side of things is so important in processing these cases, ensuring they are handled as expeditiously as possible and there is not needless delay. That is something I am looking at intensively and that is why we have the new plan for immigration and the reforms we are introducing. As I have said, I constantly have at the forefront of my mind the victims of criminality when reaching decisions and considering cases, and reading the representations that are made. When we talk in this House about serious violence, for example, and there are calls for root and branch action

[Tom Pursglove]

to tackle it, it is impossible to divorce what we are talking about today from the work we are doing more widely in Government to tackle that very harm and that scourge on our society.

**Mrs Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is believed that young adults who are being deported arrived in the UK as minors. The Home Office and the courts say that there is no such thing as a homegrown criminal, but at present no weight is being placed on rehabilitation. I am about rehabilitation. Does the Minister believe that weight should be placed on rehabilitation, especially for young people who came into this country as minors and made a mistake and committed a crime?

**Tom Pursglove:** I, too, think there is absolutely a place for rehabilitation within the criminal justice system. That is right and proper, and something I think we all broadly accept across the House, but what we are talking about here is serious criminality that is a scourge on our society and our communities, and causes real harm to real people and real families in the communities we represent. That is front and centre in the decisions we make, and of course we act in accordance with our legal responsibilities under the legislation as it stands. I have to say that I am hearing a sort of orchestra of suggestion that we are getting decisions wrong. We are getting decisions right on these cases. It is the process that is flawed and we are fixing it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): May I encourage my hon. Friend to come to the Dispatch Box more often, because that was one of the best Government statements we have had in recent times? Residents in the Kettering constituency want foreign national offenders who have committed serious and violent offences to be deported and they will be appalled that, thanks to the intervention of lefty, woke human rights immigration lawyers, 107 of those who should have left our shores this morning remain on British soil. May I urge my hon. Friend to go further and faster, arrange more flights and attach conditions so that those who are deported are never allowed to re-enter the United Kingdom?

**Tom Pursglove:** It is fair to say that the status quo is thoroughly depressing. I know that, behind people in Corby and east Northamptonshire, Kettering people are very sound and they are right to raise this issue. [Interruption.] And of course people in Wellingborough, too. They are right to demand action. They are right to be impatient for the change we have promised. We will continue to work hard and constructively to deliver the reforms we are making. The issue about people returning in breach of a deportation order is one that I am conscious of. The changes we are making through the Act, particularly around illegal entry, should help us to clamp down on that.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I know from both my own case work and my work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on immigration detention that the Home Office decision-making process is often flawed and that mistakes are often made. Can the Minister provide an updated figure on the number of cases where somebody has been removed from this

country in error and how much compensation the Government have had to pay out to those people as a result?

**Tom Pursglove:** We are driving comprehensive reform of the whole asylum and migration system through the new plan for immigration. The hon. Lady asks for specific statistics, which I do not have to hand today. I will gladly take away her question and write to her. If I can provide more specific information, I will.

**Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the simple truth is that had the Opposition supported our Nationality and Borders Act and helped us to pass this important legislation into law sooner, some of the dangerous criminals being prevented from removal would not now be on our streets?

**Tom Pursglove:** Well, rather like for me, some of the dither and delay we saw in getting on and passing that legislation has not escaped my hon. Friend's attention. I do not think there is any time to waste in getting on and delivering those reforms. The British people have spoken consistently about the need for action. We have a plan. It is the only credible plan that will fundamentally improve matters and that is why we are getting on and operationalising it.

**Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): Me and my constituents in Burnley and Padiham are sick and tired of the Labour party approach to this issue—to stand on the side of murderers, paedophiles and rapists. My constituents want to see more deportations of these foreign criminals and more flights, so I urge the Minister to lay on more flights and publicise them, so that people know that we are on the side of the law-abiding majority and the victims of these awful crimes.

**Tom Pursglove:** It is absolutely right and proper that the British Government live up to their legal obligations around the deportation of foreign national offenders from our country who have committed serious acts of crime that have blighted our communities and that blight communities such as my hon. Friend's in Burnley. He is right to raise this issue, and he has done so a number of times with me during our conversations over recent months. He is impatient, as I am, for the reform to come to fruition. We will continue to drive this agenda forward because it is the right thing to do to keep people in our communities safe from the harms that these sorts of individuals perpetrate.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for clearly outlining a workable strategy. The Government's intention to deport criminals, including paedophiles, murderers and rapists, is the right thing to do. The Government's responsibility is to protect the citizens of this country, and that is where our priorities are. Will the Minister ensure that everything is being done in accordance with the law, and will he outline the steps that are being taken to ensure that human rights for those people are protected not simply during the flight, but as they get off the plane at their destination and in the days that follow, as they attempt to integrate in society, wherever that destination may be?

**Tom Pursglove:** At all times, the UK Government act in accordance with their obligations, as is right and proper. I have been on a removal flight to see for myself the work that goes on. The teams that carry out the work act with complete respect and dignity for the individuals who are in their care for the duration of that process. They work tirelessly at that. I was hugely impressed by what I saw, by their dedication and commitment to that work, and by the vast experience that many of those individuals have in facilitating removals and deportations from our country every week of the year. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that that work is carried out entirely properly.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke are delighted that we have shipped off over 10,000 foreign national offenders since 2019, because they do not deserve to have their feet on these great British shores. However, my constituents are flabbergasted that the woke, wet and wobbly lot opposite are on the side of their leftie woke warrior lawyers in making sure that these rapists and paedophiles remain in our United Kingdom, rather than actually standing up for the British people and their safety. But it is no surprise because of Labour Members' unhealthy obsession with free movement and open borders, thinking that anyone who wants border control is a bigot and that borders are racist. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is about time that the Labour party got on the side of the British people and backed our having safer streets?

**Tom Pursglove:** I have to say, I had a bit of an inkling of what the views of people in Stoke-on-Trent might be on this issue. My hon. Friend speaks with great passion on behalf of his constituents, who want to see action in this area and safer streets. One of the things that people across the country find slightly frustrating is that some individuals who oppose our plans are not straightforward about their motivations and intentions. If we wish to have a country with no border controls, people should be honest about that fact. That is a perfectly legitimate argument to proceed with, but it is one with which I do not agree.

## Points of Order

1.23 pm

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Prime Minister's questions, my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition raised the case of someone who undergoes home dialysis, and the Prime Minister stated that the NHS covers the cost of that dialysis. The amount of money that the NHS makes available only partially covers the cost of dialysis and people are reimbursed only after they have paid their bill. That answer misrepresented the position of people who are on home dialysis, and yet again, we find ourselves asking the question: when will the Prime Minister come back and correct the record?

**Mr Speaker:** As the hon. Member knows, the answers that are given are not a question for me. However, that is on the record and it is up to individual Members to correct it.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Although we do not yet know how many candidates there will be for the election of the Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, because the nominations close next Tuesday, we know that it will be a contested election and that it will take place next Wednesday. I have received various missives from colleagues who say that they will be away on parliamentary business next Wednesday. Although this is a matter for the House, how can we facilitate the participation in that ballot of Members who will be missing, through a proxy vote or some other voting system?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for notice of his point of order. He is correct that the rules of the House do not allow the use of proxy votes in the circumstances described, unless a proxy vote is already in place. I do not think that it is right to change the procedures on the hoof, but this is an important point that might be looked at before future elections. I am sure that he will have been to see, and had a great conversation with, the Leader of the House and the Chief Whip and, hopefully, that will all have been taken on board.

**Brendan Clarke-Smith** (Bassetlaw) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you please advise me on the remedial action that could be taken to correct the record following the claim that was made at Prime Minister's questions by the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), who asserted that "the Government are slashing the support payments that farmers rely on" before a new scheme is even introduced? That claim is simply incorrect.

**Mr Speaker:** It is not for me to ensure the accuracy of what is said by Members. It is their responsibility and, if a mistake has been made, it is that Member's responsibility to correct the record. We do not want to have a full debate on Prime Minister's questions either.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to raise the issue of the statement today. The fact that a Minister came to the House to discuss an important issue, and was scrutinised for about an hour, is wholly the way in which this



[Mr Peter Bone]

democracy should work. Is there any way that you could get it through to some other Ministers that they should do that on more occasions?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member has put his case forward, but I totally agree, once again, that it is helpful that the House hears something first and that it is not heard through the media. I am sure that Ministers will have listened to him and will hopefully take it on board.

## Debate on the Address

[6TH DAY]

*Debate resumed (Order, 17 May).*

*Question again proposed.*

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which was addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

## Achieving Economic Growth

**Mr Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected amendment (w) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, which will be moved at the start of the debate, and amendments (m) and (s) which will be moved at the end of the debate. I call the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves.

1.27 pm

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): I beg to move amendment (w), at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to bring forward immediately an emergency budget to tackle the cost of living crisis or to set out a new approach to the economy that will end 12 years of slow growth and high taxation under successive Conservative Governments.”

We meet today when inflation has hit its highest level for 40 years. Every pound that people had last year can purchase only 91p-worth of goods today; that is what inflation of 9% means. Our country has a cost of living crisis and a growth crisis, with prices rising, growth downgraded and no plan for the future. None of this, though, is inevitable. It is a consequence of Conservative decisions and the direction they have taken our economy in over the past 12 years.

The Government are increasingly a rudderless ship, heading to the rocks, while they are willing to watch people financially drown in the process. Where is the urgency and the action? The time to change course is now. We need an emergency Budget to deal with the inadequacy of the Chancellor's spring statement, with a windfall tax to help to get bills down and to help families and pensioners to weather the storm. On the day that inflation has reached a 40-year high, the Chancellor is missing in action. As energy bills and anxiety levels soar, the response from the Government diminishes in comparison.

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): The hon. Lady asks where the action is. Will she accept that today £150 is going into the bank accounts of people in council tax bands A to D from councils across this country?

**Rachel Reeves:** The action that Labour proposes is a windfall tax to take up to £600 off people's bills. As the hon. Lady knows, energy bills have gone up 54%, by an average of £693. With all respect, £150 just does not cut it.



Labour first proposed a windfall tax on 9 January, more than four months ago, and what was the first response from a Conservative Minister? It was to insist that a windfall tax would be unfair because Shell and BP were “struggling”. North sea oil and gas producers are making £32 million a day in unexpected profits. Meanwhile, parents trying to pay their bills are going without food so that their children do not miss meals—that is struggling. We now know that each and every day the Conservatives delay introducing a windfall tax, families and pensioners are forking out £53 million more in their energy bills.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Last night, my party supported the amendment relating to oil and gas that was moved by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). The hon. Lady is right: there is a real need to protect our pensioners. This morning, a constituent told me that his brother, a pensioner, sleeps in a sleeping bag to keep warm; another pensioner tells me that she can turn the heating on in her house for only one hour a day. One way of helping our pensioners would be through the proposal that the hon. Lady refers to: a windfall tax on those who are making exorbitant profits.

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the hon. Member for speaking so powerfully about his constituents. After years of work and contribution to this country, a pensioner is sleeping in a sleeping bag to keep warm.

The Government got rid of the triple lock, and now they are refusing to implement a windfall tax. Every day, the case for Labour’s windfall tax gets stronger, while the Tory defence for refusing to act gets weaker and weaker, yet last night every single Conservative MP voted against a windfall tax for the third time. People can no longer afford to pay for the Government’s mistakes. The Government should put the national interest first and follow Labour’s advice. It is time to do the right thing; it is time to put the needs of people first; it is time to introduce a windfall tax to get bills down.

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): Will the hon. Lady clarify one thing? There is a bit of dispute about how much a windfall tax would raise per household. There are about 25 million households in the UK. Will the hon. Lady confirm how much money per household a windfall tax would actually raise?

**Rachel Reeves:** A windfall tax would raise about £3 billion. That, combined with the extra VAT that the Government are receiving because prices have gone up so much, could go directly towards taking money off people’s bills. It would make a real impact now. Every single day, the energy companies are making £32 million in unexpected profits. This Government increase taxes on working people; a Labour Government would increase taxes on the big oil and gas companies.

The cost of living crisis is being made worse by a wage crisis, as years of Conservative Governments have failed to stand up for working people. At the Conservative party conference last year, the Prime Minister bragged of plans for a high-wage economy. How is that going? Let me update the House. In the six months since then, average real-terms pay has not risen, but fallen. Behind the headline figures, data released yesterday by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows not only that workers are experiencing a fall in their real pay, but that the gap

between those earning most and those earning least is widening. For the hospital porters, the supermarket assistants, the delivery drivers—the very people who worked tirelessly through the pandemic to keep this country going—wages are in no way keeping up with the rising cost of living.

**Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I just want clarification of the figures, because they are very important. The hon. Lady said that a windfall tax would raise £3 billion; among 25 million households, that is just over £100 each, which is less than the Government are giving. She then said that there would be £600 for each household, but that would cost about £18 billion, which is £15 billion more than the windfall tax would raise. Where would that extra £15 billion come from? Would it come from an increase in Government borrowing?

**Rachel Reeves:** Our scheme is very clear. We would introduce a windfall tax, use that money to reduce VAT on gas and electricity bills from 5% to zero, and expand the warm home discount from the measly £140 that people get today to £400. We would fund that through the windfall tax, through the additional VAT receipts that the Government are getting in at the moment because prices are so high, and through receipts from the additional corporation tax that the oil and gas companies are paying. The Government will end up doing this. The only question is when they will get on and deliver for their constituents. Oil and gas companies are making record profits and people are paying record bills. It is a question of whose side you are on. The Government are very clear that they are on the side of the oil and gas companies; the Opposition are very clear that we are on the side of ordinary families and pensioners.

The Government have failed to introduce not only the windfall tax, but the employment Bill that has been repeatedly promised. There is a real-world price: allowing scandalous threats of fire and rehire to continue to drive down conditions at work, not just in the appalling P&O case, but in other sectors. Fire and rehire should have been outlawed, but thanks to this Government’s actions it is being encouraged. Employment rights for the modern world of work will not just protect workers, but boost growth and financial security. That makes for a stronger economy with firm foundations, rather than allowing a race to the bottom that takes away dignity as well as eroding family finances.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) *rose*—

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) *rose*—

**Rachel Reeves:** I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves).

**Ellie Reeves:** As well as struggling with rising fuel bills and food prices, many of my constituents are worried about their precarious work, about not knowing from one week to the next what hours they will get, and about being fired by unscrupulous employers. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Queen’s Speech was a missed opportunity to introduce the long-awaited employment Bill, which would ensure that workers get the dignity and security that they desperately need?

**Rachel Reeves:** The sad truth is that the Government used to agree. Introducing an employment Bill was in their manifesto; in fact, they have been promising it for five or six years. Let us have that employment Bill to protect people at work, so that working people do not have to resort to food banks, and so that they have the security and dignity that work should provide.

April's International Monetary Fund data show that families in Britain are more exposed to the cost of living crisis than countries such as Germany, France and the US because of depleted savings. Savings are declining and household debt is on the rise, not because millions of people can no longer manage a budget, but because millions of people cannot afford a Conservative Government. Working families are increasingly struggling with their budgets because the Chancellor has failed to act in his Budgets. The Food Foundation believes that since January, 2 million people have not eaten food for at least a whole day, because they could not afford to.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

**Kevin Hollinrake** *rose—*

**Rachel Reeves:** I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies).

**Geraint Davies:** My hon. Friend knows that food banks were used by something like 26,000 people in 2010 and are now used by 2.6 million people—100 times as many. Does she agree that the economy's growth now contrasts dismally with its 40% growth in the 10 years to 2008 under Labour? The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that if we were on the same growth trend, the average person would be £11,000 better off and could therefore weather the storms that we are suffering because of the Tory Government.

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the Tory growth penalty—the effect of the lack of growth in the economy. Average earnings are £11,000 less than if growth had stayed at the same rate as under the last Labour Government.

My hon. Friend mentioned a hundredfold increase in food bank use. This is not normal; it is the consequence of Conservative Governments' choices. Meanwhile, what have we heard in recent weeks? We have heard suggestions from Ministers about what people can do in their own lives to deal with the cost of living crisis. The Prime Minister thinks that a 77-year-old pensioner who rides on the bus all day to keep warm should be grateful for her discounted fares; the Environment Secretary has lectured people struggling with the cost of food, telling them to “buy own brands”; and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has treated the need for an emergency Budget as if it were an audition for a comedy club. Another out-of-touch Minister has told people, just this week, that if they are struggling financially they should simply work more hours or get another job—as if it were as easy as that. The Chancellor continues to insult the public's intelligence by suggesting that a compulsory £200 loan—a loan that must be repaid—is somehow not a loan, and now blames a computer system for his decision not to help the least well-off. What planet are they on?

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that given that wages have been falling for the last 14 years and inflation is now at 9%,

or 11% for the poorest families, there is an alternative to people's wages being squeezed—that the Government could squeeze profits instead? Shell and BP raked in more than £12 billion in the first three months of this year alone, and it is shameful that every Conservative Member voted against a windfall tax yesterday when they had the chance to support it.

**Rachel Reeves:** Conservative Members voted against the windfall tax not for the first time, not for the second time, but for the third time. Every single Conservative MP opposed what they know is the right thing to do. A Labour Government would tackle the cost of living crisis head-on. We would introduce a windfall tax on oil and gas producer profits to cut household bills by up to £600, a home insulation policy that would save millions of households up to £400 a year, and a discount on business rates for high street firms funded by a tax on the online giants. Perhaps the Chief Secretary can tell us in his speech why the Government will not abolish the unfair, outdated and unjustifiable non-dom tax status, and use that money to keep taxes on working people down.

Finally, Labour would put a stop to the Chancellor's fraud failures, which allowed £11.8 billion of taxpayer funds to go criminal gangs, drug dealers and worse. We would claw back every penny of taxpayers' money that we could, because the public are sick of being ripped off and they want their money back.

We are now in the worst of all possible worlds, with inflation high and rising, and growth low and falling—in other words, there is stagflation. This Conservative Government must address the underlying weaknesses in our economy, which are the result of years of Tory failure. Growth has stagnated, not just this year but over the last 12 years, falling from 2% on average under the last Labour Government to just 1.5% a year in the decade leading up to the pandemic.

The Conservatives have failed to work with British industries—employers and trade unions—to create the economic growth that would benefit everyone, and for 12 years that approach has sown chaos and uncertainty, making it impossible for businesses to invest with confidence. Now the UK economy has the worst growth projections of any G20 economy but one: Russia.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Reeves:** The Bank of England has issued a stark warning of a downturn next year, with GDP projected to fall, and it is not set to get much better after that. [*Interruption.*] The Chief Secretary says, from a sedentary position, that it is set to get better. Oh, yes—growth in the following year is expected to be 0.25%, almost 10 times lower than what the Office for Budget Responsibility predicted in March. Well, done, Tory Government!

We have heard nothing from this Conservative Government about what they will do to change the situation, and if the Chief Secretary is proud of that record, good luck to him. The Government have no plan to provide the catalytic investment that we need to create new markets, no plan to get trade moving again and tackle the supply chain problems facing businesses, and no plan for a new industrial strategy to make the most of Britain's potential, bringing good jobs to all parts of Britain. The Conservatives have become the low-growth party, and our country is paying the price.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making some powerful points about the fall in growth. I am sure she will be as concerned as I am about the statistics which show the decline in business investment, which I think is down by 9%. We are seeing a 34% fall in automotive production, which is a massive hit for the UK economy. The impact on our foreign competitors is less, because those countries have a strategy. Does my hon. Friend agree that this Government seem not to have an industrial strategy—for gaming semiconductor production, for example? Does she agree that that is what is needed, and that is what a Labour Government would do?

**Rachel Reeves:** The figures from the International Monetary Fund show that investment as a proportion of our economy in the UK is 18%, if we take both public and private investment into account. In other similar economies that the IMF looks at, it is 23%. If we add that up over the next six years—the IMF's forecast horizon—we see a projection of £1 trillion less investment in the UK than in other countries. These are huge missed opportunities to create the jobs and industries of the future that my hon. Friend wants to see in Warwick and Leamington and all of us want to see in our constituencies.

The Government's lack of action is felt by businesses. In April, the price of materials for UK manufacturers increased at its fastest rate since records began, with prices up by nearly a fifth on the previous year. When I speak to businesses, they are worried about falling consumer confidence and a lack of spending power, as well as the costs that they are having to face.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Reeves:** The British Retail Consortium has explained that the rising cost of living has crushed consumer confidence and put the brakes on consumer spending. So many businesses that worked tirelessly to adapt and survive the pandemic were banking on this year to recover, and it is just not happening.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will the hon. Lady give way, on that point?

**Rachel Reeves:** We could be so much better. Our geography, our universities and our industrial heritage offer so much potential, but the Government do not do enough to unlock it. I have seen the brilliant businesses and emerging industries that will power our economy and lead the world: businesses such as Nanopore, a technology and life sciences firm that started as a research team at Oxford University and now employs more than 600 people; Rolls-Royce in Derby—I was there a couple of weeks ago—which is leading pioneering research with world-leading engineers developing carbon-neutral technologies; and Castleton Mills in my own city of Leeds, once a key part of West Yorkshire's textiles industry but now a creative, collaborative space housing freelancers, remote workers and start-up businesses.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Reeves:** However, the success that I see all around the country could be strengthened with strong leadership and vision from the Government. Ministers are more concerned about the next headline or photoshoot than about creating credible plans for growth and success.

Today, as inflation spirals out of control, where is the £3.4 million PR budget in the Treasury, and what is the Treasury doing?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Reeves:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurray!"]

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I will sit here again next time.

The hon. Lady mentioned earlier the support for households in the form of the £200 discount on their energy bills. That went to 100% of households. The £150 council tax deduction reached 80% of households. Will the hon. Lady tell us what percentage of households would receive the £600 per household to which she referred?

**Rachel Reeves:** It is great to see Conservative Members taking so much interest in this. It suggests to me that a policy from them on the windfall tax is coming soon, and it will be welcome.

We have said that the £600 would go to a third of households. We would increase the warm home discount from £140 to £400, and that would go to a third of households. The hon. Member is, like me, an MP in Yorkshire. Across Yorkshire, every day, an extra £4.5 million is spent on energy costs as a result of the Conservative party's failure. A total of £220 million has been spent in the seven weeks since the energy price cap went up. Constituents in Thirsk and Malton, like my constituents in Leeds West, are looking for answers, and an expansion of the warm home discount, paid for by a windfall tax, would make a massive difference throughout our region in Yorkshire.

We need an ambitious plan for the future. That is why Labour will scrap business rates, and the system that replaces them will incentivise investment, promote entrepreneurship and bring life back to our high streets. The race is on for the next generation of jobs, and Labour will make the investment we need with a growth plan to bring opportunities to the whole country, working in partnership with great British industries to get us to net zero and revitalise coastal communities and former industrialised towns. We do not want to be importing all the technologies and products we need; if we can make it here in Britain, we should do so. That is why a Labour Government will buy, make and sell more here at home.

We will make Brexit work, with a bespoke EU-UK veterinary agreement to cut red tape for the food and agriculture industries and mutual recognition of professional qualifications to help our fantastic business services industries and to make it easier for our creative industries to tour and perform. Unlike the Conservatives, Labour will ensure that our economy grows and prosperity is shared.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On the matter of making Brexit work, there is a concern that the United Kingdom now mirrors the United States with its labour shortages, rather than mirroring the right to work across the European Union. This is having a drastic effect on the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Can the hon. Member say a wee bit more about how they want to emulate Europe's labour market situation rather than that of the United States with its labour shortages?



**Rachel Reeves:** The best way to fill those gaps in the labour market is to be training people here in Britain. We have seen the nurses shortage in the papers today. We are having to bring in nurses from all around the world because we are not training nurses here. There are job vacancies here in Britain, and we need to ensure that our young people get the opportunities to train for those high-paid and high-skilled jobs here in Britain. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says that no one disputes that, so why are the Government not doing it?

The Tories are out of touch and they are out of ideas. They are the party of high taxes because they are the party of low growth. Their choices have made the cost of living crisis much worse than it needed to be. Their decisions have left those with the least fearing for the future. The Tories cannot be trusted with public money. They have handed billions to their friends, to their donors and to fraudsters. We need an emergency Budget with a windfall tax to keep energy bills down. We need a Government that take growth seriously. We need a new vision for a fairer and more prosperous economy. Labour has a different economic approach: pro-worker and pro-business, with a plan to unleash the potential of both. A Labour Government would steer our country through these difficult times together. I urge Members across the House to do the right thing today and vote for an emergency Budget to get our country and our economy back on track.

1.53 pm

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke):** It is a privilege to respond to this debate on behalf of the Government. I have to say that I thought that was an uncharacteristically poor speech by the shadow Chancellor, and one that failed to rise to the magnitude of the moment. In the shadow of the pandemic and with war on our continent, everyone understands that these are challenging times and that people are anxious about the future. The measure of a Government of any colour is the determination and imagination with which they respond to the challenges of the day. We responded quickly and comprehensively to the greatest challenge of our generation at the outset of the pandemic. Looking forward, we are helping to create the conditions for economic growth by investing in skills, helping businesses to grow and building the infrastructure that provides the backbone of every economy around the world. The crucial thing—the reason that today’s debate is so important—is that we focus on that growth, and this Queen’s Speech does just that.

Let me begin by noting that overall our economy has proved very resilient. Last year the UK was the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Growth in the first quarter—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members listened, they might learn something. Growth in the first quarter was stronger than in the US, Germany and Italy, and pushed output to 0.7% above its pre-pandemic level at the end of 2019. The IMF forecasts that the UK will be the second-fastest growing G7 economy this year, and that, after other economies have caught up as they recover more slowly from the pandemic, we will have the fastest growth in 2025 and 2026.

Far from the dire forecasts about unemployment in 2020 being realised, we see that unemployment has fallen back to just 3.7%, which is below pre-pandemic levels and the lowest since 1974. The fact that 12 million

jobs and incomes were protected during the pandemic, that unemployment is now lower than before the pandemic and that we were the fastest-growing economy in the G7 last year is all thanks to the careful economic stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and this Conservative Government.

**Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab):** Given that inflation is now at 9%—I think that that is a 40-year high—does the Minister regret abandoning the triple lock and putting so many pensioners into poverty?

**Mr Clarke:** As I will set out during my remarks, we have to be very careful, in setting our tax and welfare policies, that we do not worsen the very problems we are trying to manage. That is an important dynamic that we have to hold in balance as we seek to set fair offers on all these subjects.

It is still little more than two years since the onset of the pandemic and, as the Prime Minister told the House this week, its impact has been enormous, with the largest recession on record requiring a Government response amounting to nearly £400 billion. As the House well knows, the Government moved heaven and earth to support our economy, doing things that only weeks earlier no one could ever have expected us to even need to do, and those efforts worked. Human nature being human nature, it is easy to take it for granted when disaster is avoided, but there was nothing inevitable about this. The House and this country owe my right hon. Friend the Chancellor our thanks for steering us through the situation in such strong condition. The challenges we face now are global in origin and impact. We are seeing inflation as a consequence of the unsteady and tentative unlocking of the global economy post-pandemic. One need only look at cities such as Shanghai to see how disrupted the global supply chains currently are. This is particularly concentrated in fields such as energy and food.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab):** I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman is saying that the Chancellor and his Ministers are moving heaven and earth to help the good British people, but would he agree that certain individuals also moved heaven and earth to give out billions of pounds’-worth of crony covid contracts to companies connected to Tory donors and friends? Who could forget, for example, that 11 PPE contracts were dished out to a pest control company, and that £252 million ended up going not to a PPE specialist but to a company specialising in offshore and foreign currency trading? Does he agree that, had those individuals not moved heaven and earth for those particular companies, the good, hard-working British people would not be in such a predicament now?

**Mr Clarke:** It is important to set out a number of facts about this situation, because it is the subject of repeated misrepresentation. The first thing to say is that 97% of all PPE that was purchased by the Government was fit for use. Secondly, we obviously had to proceed at enormous speed, given the exigencies of the pandemic, to procure that PPE. Those on the Opposition Benches were leading the charge on that. To the hon. Gentleman’s point about some of the sources that were being advocated, I would remind him that the shadow Chancellor herself recommended that we sought PPE from a historical re-enactment clothing company as part of the proposed

solution. The point I would make is that there was a desperate situation and we responded to it at pace. Where there has been fraud against the Exchequer, I am as clear as any Minister and any Member of this House that we should pursue it, and we are funding a dedicated taxpayer protection taskforce from HMRC with £100 million to do exactly that.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I understand that lots of countries in the world have been through similar problems and also have a cost of living crisis, but can the Minister explain why the British Government are being so miserly when Greece, which has a similar set of issues and has been through much more difficult economic times in the past 12 years, is managing to meet 80% of the additional costs of fuel bills this year for the poorest households?

**Mr Clarke:** One has to set in context the action that each Government take against their particular situation and the particular economic options open to them, including the impact on taxes, of which we are acutely aware. This Government have consistently shown that we will rise to the challenge. Anyone who says that £22 billion is miserly is simply misreading the economic reality in a way that speaks volumes about the Labour party's wider approach to budgeting responsibly and managing our public finances to protect the most vulnerable in society and the services on which they rely.

To return to the situation as it stands today, the Bank of England has said that it expects inflation to peak at just over 10% in the fourth quarter of this year, before returning to target over the following year. The reality is that high global energy prices and supply chain pressures are pushing up prices in economies across the world, including in the United Kingdom, and that has been significantly worsened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has injected so much uncertainty into the economic outlook.

We are monitoring the data very closely. I do not dispute that these challenges are a setback to our recovery and are having a significant impact on the cost of living, which was the subject of yesterday's debate led by the Chancellor. However, last year's strong rebound in growth put us in a good underlying economic position, with half a million more people on the payroll now than before the pandemic, and with GDP above pre-pandemic levels.

As we heard yesterday, the Chancellor understands the effect of inflation on households and is providing support worth £22 billion this year to ease those pressures. He will keep all those issues under close review and we will bring forward a programme of measures at such time as they will make the right difference in a targeted way, but we must be careful not to fuel the very challenges that we are working to overcome, be that inflation or the size of our public debt.

We will spend £83 billion on debt interest this year. We must, and we will, manage the public finances responsibly because we must not saddle future generations with our debt and because we want to reduce the burden of personal taxation.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary to the Treasury confirm the nature of that £83 billion figure? Is it a cash demand on

the Government, or is a substantial part of it rolled over so that we do not need to pay and it is merely attached to index-linked bonds?

**Mr Clarke:** Some of it falls due as cash payments and some of it is rolled over. The reality is that, when we are running an £83 billion interest payment on an annualised basis, we will not be in a position to maintain market confidence unless we set out a sustainable trajectory to address it. A sustainable solution cannot be to borrow our way out of the situation; it must be to grow our economy and to create high-skilled, high-waged jobs, and we have a comprehensive plan to do so. That is the choice we have made as a Government and it is absolutely the right one.

**Geraint Davies:** The Chief Secretary to the Treasury mentioned that there are 500,000 more people on payrolls, but he neglected to say that that does not include self-employed people. Will he confirm that, according to the Office for National Statistics, there are, in fact, 444,000 fewer people in work than before the pandemic, not, as he implied, half a million more?

**Mr Clarke:** There are half a million more people on payrolls, and I was very clear about that. The headline unemployment rate is 3.7%, which we should celebrate. It is a genuine public policy success and contrasts starkly with the situation we inherited in 2010. I, certainly, am determined to continue supporting it by making sure our economic policy is the right one.

The Labour party has only one answer to every problem: spending more. It has made, by our calculations, £418 billion-worth of spending commitments, while setting out precisely how £8 billion would be funded. The scale of spending that Labour would undertake is vast, but what concerns me, and should concern us all, is the lack of seriousness with which Labour considers how to fund its commitments. That is the luxury of being in opposition, whereas in government there is no ducking away from the big challenges with which we are grappling.

Achieving economic growth is not as simple as putting one's foot down on the accelerator. It is a far subtler and more balanced enterprise that includes multiple carefully weighed decisions that are designed to mutually reinforce each other over time.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Does the Chief Secretary to the Treasury agree that the private sector is our economy's engine of growth? Businesses are getting up, working hard and developing the growth, jobs and prosperity this country needs. We cannot rely on the state to do everything. Private businesses must be supported.

**Mr Clarke:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. He is always a fantastic advocate for the car industry in his part of the midlands. We need to make sure that the engine of growth is able to fire, and our plan for growth, published last year, sets out how we will increase investment in the three pillars of growth: infrastructure, skills and innovation.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** On business opportunities, specifically for small and medium-sized business, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research basically is pouring cold water on the Government's bunkum on the benefits of Brexit for the economy, so I

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

wonder whether the Chief Secretary to the Treasury agrees or disagrees, when it comes to small and medium-sized businesses that need people in the country now, not trained 10 years down the line, that links with the EU through trade and potential labour market mobility have benefited Northern Ireland. Does he agree or disagree?

**Mr Clarke:** I am clear that we were right to implement the majority decision of the people of this country to leave the European Union. The Procurement Bill is designed precisely to make sure that small and medium-sized businesses can access the benefits of public procurement in a way that works to their considerable benefit.

We have made excellent progress against our plan for growth: a landmark capital uplift in the spending review I chaired last autumn; the creation of the UK Infrastructure Bank led by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary; more funding for apprenticeships and skills training; a big injection of public investment in R&D; and the launch of the UK-wide Help to Grow scheme.

I want to see us go further by looking at innovative supply-side solutions to problems, particularly in delivering the homes people need, in ensuring people have access to the services they need and in carefully managing the risk of inflationary spirals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) alluded to, this is all about creating the conditions for private sector growth. In his Mais lecture earlier this year, the Chancellor set out his plans to create the conditions for that growth by supporting a culture of enterprise through a focus on capital, people and ideas, and the Government have already taken steps to encourage business investment, including through the super-deduction.

On expenditure incurred between 1 April 2021 and the end of March 2023, companies have the right to claim 130% capital allowances on qualifying plant and machinery investments, allowing them to cut their tax bill by up to 25p in every £1 they invest, making our capital allowances regime one of the most competitive anywhere in the world.

The power of our private sector is also seen in our tech industry, in which there was more than £27 billion of investment in 2021. The UK sits alongside the United States and China as one of only three countries in the world to have produced more than 100 tech unicorns. The UK boasts a thriving start-up scene, with a new tech business launching every half an hour throughout 2020.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I declare my interest on this point.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury talks about investment in private sector businesses. Equity investment is vital. The enterprise investment scheme and the seed enterprise investment scheme are fundamental to private sector investment in businesses, and they are due to expire in 2025. Will he announce from the Dispatch Box today that the schemes will be extended?

**Mr Clarke:** My hon. Friend tempts me. In all seriousness, we are acutely aware of this issue. Indeed, I have had meetings on it this week, and the Economic Secretary is looking at it very closely. We want to make sure we have the right investment climate to support the kind of activity to which my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) alludes.

As the Prime Minister told the House last week, we need the legislative firepower to fix the underlying problems in our energy supply, housing, infrastructure and skills, which are driving up costs for families across the country. The Queen's Speech will help us to grow the economy, which is the sustainable way to deal with our cost of living challenges, and will ensure that we deliver on the people's priorities. The Bills it outlined will do so in many different ways.

Every corner of the country can contribute to, and enjoy, economic growth, which is why we created the UK Infrastructure Bank, the establishment of which will be completed by the UK Infrastructure Bank Bill. The bank will be explicitly tasked with supporting regional and local economic growth and helping to tackle climate change as it goes. With £22 billion of capacity, it will be able to support infrastructure investment and level up the whole United Kingdom, in turn boosting private sector confidence and unlocking a further £18 billion of private investment.

The energy security Bill will build on the success of the COP26 summit in Glasgow, reduce our exposure to volatile global gas markets, and deliver a managed transition to cheaper, cleaner and more secure energy, all while we continue to help with energy costs right now, through a £9 billion package, an increase to the warm home discount and the £1 billion household support fund.

I have already alluded to the importance of skills. We have achieved plenty on that already, but we are far from done. Everyone, everywhere should be encouraged to fulfil their potential. The higher education Bill will help to ensure that our post-18 education system promotes real social mobility, putting students on to pathways along which they can excel. It will give them the skills they need to meet their aspirations, in turn helping to grow the economy.

Meanwhile, a bonanza of Brexit Bills, led by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency, mean that we will continue to seize the benefits of our departure from the European Union, and create a regulatory environment that encourages prosperity, business innovation and entrepreneurship. Regulations on businesses will be repealed and reformed and it will be made easier to amend law inherited from the European Union.

I alluded earlier to the Procurement Bill, which will make public sector procurement simpler, providing opportunities to small businesses that for too long have been out of their reach. New procedures will improve transparency and accountability and allow new suppliers to the market to bid for future contracts.

Another benefit to Brexit is the freedom with which we can now negotiate entirely new trade arrangements with partners around the world. The Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill will enable the implementation of the United Kingdom's first new free trade agreements since leaving the European Union, spurring economic growth through our trading relationships, creating and securing jobs across this country. Well may Opposition Front Benchers snipe, having spent years trying to prevent our exit from the EU. Conservative Members know that we have honoured our contract with the British people, which is ultimately why we are in government to deliver on those opportunities and they are in opposition.



Part of having a growing economy is of course about investors knowing that we are one of the safest and most reliable places in the world to do business. The economic crime and corporate transparency Bill will send that message out loud and clear, cracking down on illicit finance that costs the economy and the taxpayer an estimated £8.4 billion a year, and strengthening our reputation as a place where legitimate businesses can create and grow jobs.

The final Bill to which I will draw the House's attention today is the financial services and markets Bill. The UK now has a unique opportunity to assess whether it wants to do things differently, to ensure that the financial services sector has the right rules and regulations for UK markets and to further enhance a system that is already the envy of the world. The Chancellor and the Economic Secretary have been outspoken in expressing an ambitious vision for a sector that can contribute so much to this country: more open, more innovative and more competitive. The financial services and markets Bill represents further progress towards making that vision a reality, establishing a coherent, agile and internationally respected approach to financial services regulation that is specifically designed for the UK, removing red tape, promoting investment and giving our financial services regulators new objectives to ensure a greater focus on growth and international competitiveness.

That is a full and ambitious agenda, supporting and encouraging economic growth in many mutually reinforcing ways across the entire country. We continue to keep the wider situation under review, including the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. But, crucially, our focus is on the best solution of all: a growing economy supporting high-wage, high-skilled jobs.

The Prime Minister told the House last week that our ambition is to

"build the foundations for decades of prosperity, uniting and levelling up across the country".—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 17.]

That is what the public rightly expect and that is where our collective efforts will be focused in this parliamentary Session.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind Members that it is very important that those wishing to speak in the debate get here for the opening contributions from the Front Benchers, make sure that they get back in good time for the closing speeches—it is essential and courteous to be here—and stay in the Chamber for most of the debate, because it is important to hear what other people have to say. After I call the SNP spokesperson, I will be going to the Back Benchers. I do not want to put a time limit on, but I would advise that speeches of about seven minutes would be helpful to make sure that everybody makes an equal contribution. I call SNP spokesperson Alison Thewliss.

2.14 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Today is National Numeracy Day and there will be a lot of figures flying about this afternoon. It often makes me think that it would be helpful in this place if we were

allowed to do as they do in the US Senate and have great big charts we can point at to make these debates easier for people to follow. But the Bank of England's predictions on GDP growth, thankfully for the Government, are quite easy to illustrate—they are pretty much a flat line. The cost of living crisis and Brexit continue to hold back growth, and opportunities for more sustainable, inclusive growth, conscious of our climate obligations presented at the COP26 summit in my constituency last year, are being squandered. It is not so much a Union dividend as a stagnant economy. It does not have to be this way.

We need to recognise that the endless pursuit of GDP growth at any cost destroys communities and the planet. Growth should be inclusive and should prioritise policies that tackle inequalities, contribute to net zero and provide high-quality jobs. Investing in green technologies, in insulating and retrofitting homes, and in improving public transport would all be a good start, but no Bills in the Queen's Speech get close to that ambition. In Scotland, the SNP has put wellbeing at the heart of our economic strategy. It is through wellbeing and fair work that we can deliver higher rates of employment and wage growth, reduce poverty, and improve outcomes for disadvantaged families and communities.

I was proud to serve on the Scottish Government's Social Justice and Fairness Commission, which, prior to the pandemic, set out some of the direction of travel. Last week, the Scottish Government announced the establishment of a new centre of expertise in equality and human rights, which will see the Scottish Government working with leading experts to address economic inequality, building on the principle that a fairer economy is a stronger economy.

Post pandemic, we are presented with a clear choice over whether to lead or to lag behind other successful and more equal economies while we recover from covid, deliver net zero, tackle structural inequalities and grow the economy. The UK Tory Government have chosen to ignore the problems and to lag. The UK economy is now forecast to be the worst-performing G7 economy next year. This week, we had more of the Chancellor's sleight of hand on Twitter, in using a scale on a graph that makes less than 1% in GDP growth look good. It is not that good, so the Government should stop pretending that it is, and it is in no small part a consequence of their policy choices.

There has been no clear economic strategy from the UK Tory Government, yet the policy choice that looms over all things, from the Northern Ireland protocol disputes to manufacturing and labour supply, is Brexit. There is no doubt that global forces are posing huge challenges now, but these have been compounded by Brexit, the daftest of all economic policies. By December 2021, leaving the single market and customs union had reduced UK goods trade by 14.9%. Analysis by the Centre for European Reform shows that UK exports have taken a larger hit than imports. Pushing through that Brexit cliff edge in the middle of a pandemic, and masking the economic damage regardless of the economic cost, is an act of great economic self-sabotage. GDP growth in the UK is only about half the EU average since the Brexit referendum.

**Chris Grayling** *rose*—

**Alison Thewliss:** I will certainly give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he can explain why there is a benefit of Brexit when we see only economic harm.

**Chris Grayling:** I ask the hon. Lady to correct the record. If she looks at the website of the Office for National Statistics, she will see that the opposite of what she is saying is the case. In fact, UK imports from the European Union have fallen, whereas UK exports to the EU have recovered. It is not clear why that is, but that is what the ONS says and I hope she will go away, read that website and correct the record.

**Alison Thewliss:** That goes to my point that we can make all kinds of statistics show all kinds of things. But what we hear from food producers in Scotland is that it is very difficult for them to get their high-quality exports to the European markets, and that is a direct choice with Brexit. We have also seen it become easier for EU goods to get into the country and more difficult for UK goods to get out—these mad policies have caused all kinds of difficulties.

We face weak growth in 2023 in comparison with not just the G7, but most of the world, as well as higher inflation by far than anywhere in the eurozone. Figures today that put inflation at 9% are shocking, and it is only May. Some of that inflation rate has come about via the Government's choice—and it was a choice—to increase VAT back to 20%. Given the rampant energy costs, it is certain that more price rises are yet to come.

Last week, Adam Posen, the president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told the Treasury Committee that in his view, a

“substantial majority of the inflation differential for the UK over the euro area is due to Brexit”.

That is a choice by this Government that is making things harder for people in these islands. It is an act of self-harm supported not only by the Tory ideologues, of course, but now by the Labour Front-Bench team, who apparently want to make Brexit work, against all good reason and good evidence, and against the 62% of people in Scotland who voted to remain in the EU. Earlier in the week, when I asked Ministers about the benefits of Brexit, they pointed out freeports in Teesside, which will not have huge benefits for my constituents, that is for certain.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I do not want to labour the point, but when it comes to freedom of movement, if people want to make Brexit work, perhaps the easiest way is to make the Northern Ireland protocol cover the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Alison Thewliss:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion because, of course, Northern Ireland has benefited from that.

Investment in our communities has taken a direct hit from the loss of European structural funds. The UK Government's shared prosperity fund will see Scotland allocated £32 million in 2022, £55 million in 2023 and £125 million in 2024—but even that third year of funding will deliver less than Scotland received before Brexit.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** *rose—*

**Alison Thewliss:** If the hon. Member would like to explain to me why Scotland deserves less now than it had before Brexit, I will take his intervention.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Would the hon. Lady like to explain to the House how much harder it would be for business and what it would do to living standards in Scotland if Scotland followed the SNP's suggestion and left the United Kingdom, with a border across the middle of Great Britain?

**Alison Thewliss:** There are multiple benefits to Scotland being independent, and the greatest one would certainly be not having to live with policy choices made by this Government, for whom none of our people voted.

The Scottish Government have calculated that £162 million per year would be needed to replace the European regional development fund and European social fund, and that increases to £183 million per year when LEADER funding and the EU territorial co-operation programmes are added in. That means there is a significant shortfall for organisations and projects that are already operating with significant challenges from the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Of course, many such organisations, which fund projects such as bridges and green infrastructure, and retrain those who have lost their job or are far from the labour market, were contributing significantly to economic growth. Without the money to replace them, the areas and people involved will struggle to make progress, just as Bloomberg suggests is already happening with the flawed Tory levelling-up fund.

Before the pandemic, investment was stagnant because of the drawn-out uncertainty of Brexit and an unnecessary commitment to leaving the customs union and the single market. The harm to the economy and to people's pockets could have been lessened had different choices been made. There has been a lot of talk about the Northern Ireland protocol, but the reality is that Manufacturing Northern Ireland has found that the issue is largely with GB suppliers that are unwilling to send to Northern Ireland, while EU supply chains have recovered. There has been a 28% increase in sales with the EU and manufacturing jobs in Northern Ireland are now growing four times faster than the UK average.

The Bills mentioned in the Queen's Speech do nothing to redress the damage caused by Brexit. James Withers from Scotland Food & Drink said:

“Had the war in Ukraine not happened, we were already facing energy bills rising, a world waking up from a pandemic...Brexit for sure has made nothing better, but has made a number of things a lot worse.”

Mr Withers also pointed to the labour market being in disarray. This UK Tory Government's obsession with limiting immigration is causing untold harm to our growth prospects. Yesterday, the Office for National Statistics noted that around half a million people have left the labour market completely since start of the pandemic, and we do not know whether they will come back. Meanwhile, vacancies are running at a record high of 1.295 million. Who will fill these jobs? The Government have absolutely no answer to that. All these vacancies are already having an impact: surveys by the British Chambers of Commerce have found that companies cannot fulfil orders because of a lack of staff, as well as soaring material costs. Perpetuating the

hostile environment is bad economics as well as morally dubious politics. It is not a recipe for growth: it is a recipe for self-inflicted economic catastrophe.

Precious little in the Queen's Speech will help with the spiralling cost of living crisis and soaring energy prices. The April 2022 price cap was already 75% higher than one year ago. Miatta Fahnbulleh of the New Economics Foundation said that

"the government said its priority was...to help people with the cost of living crisis...Yet we had 38 bills that will barely have an impact on that agenda."

Whether people are in work or out of work, the money in their pockets is being eroded every single day by inflation. The UK Tory Government could choose to put money into people's pockets. They could introduce an emergency Budget to make sure that the least well-off—those who are really struggling, those who need support with their energy bills to get by—are supported. The SNP Government have uplifted the benefits in their control by 6%; there, again, the UK Tory Government lag behind. People are seeing the money that they receive eroded every single day.

The UK Government should be converting the £200 heat now, pay later loan into a grant. As the chief executive of ScottishPower has said, they should be increasing that grant substantially—he says to £1,000—to help people with their energy bills. Such is the magnitude of the increase in people's costs. The UK Government should scrap the regressive national insurance tax hike, which is a tax on jobs at the worst possible time; reverse the £1,040 cut to universal credit; and support those on legacy benefits, who have seen very little from this Government. They should also introduce a real living wage—a living wage for all that people can actually live on—rather than their pretend living wage, which is not even available to all ages, with age discrimination baked in. They should also look at removing VAT on energy bills, which is a significant cost.

The Government have been raking it in: additional money that they did not expect has come in through the taxation system, as set out in the spring statement, and that will increase every day as VAT receipts come in and inflation soars.

As a proportion of income, the rise in the cost of living for poorer families is nine times larger than it is for the richest 5%. Institute for Fiscal Studies figures suggest that although inflation today is at 9%, for the least well-off it is just shy of 11%. The impact of such inflation on people can sound a bit abstract when we talk about percentages here and there, but the Child Poverty Action Group has calculated that with inflation running at 9%, the value of someone's universal credit falls by £790 per year. That is a lot of money to the people who receive that benefit and the Government should be doing more about it.

All the way through the supply chain—from those growing crops and those processing and transporting food, to those stacking it on the shelves, to those cooking their tea and putting it on the table—costs are increasing. Businesses are being pushed to the very limits to absorb the costs and it cannot continue for much longer.

When I watch Treasury Ministers in this place, it is hard for me to hide my frustration, because they have all the levers that my colleagues in Holyrood do not

have, yet not one iota of the ambition or imagination. There is so much that they could do to invest in people and communities, to work towards the promise of COP26 and to build a fairer, more just and more equal society—to grow, but in a way that leaves no one behind. We cannot rely on the Conservatives or Labour—both are now Brexiteer parties—because Scotland wants to take its place in the world. We want to be part of something and to be connected, rather than to rely on the tiny ambitions of this Government. People in Scotland are yearning for a Government with the powers to do better by their people; I hope they will soon get the chance to vote for that in an independence referendum.

2.28 pm

**Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss).

I rise to support many of the Bills in the Queen's Speech. In particular, I wish to support the contention that slow growth is the long-term bane of the British economy, going back many decades, so I wholeheartedly welcome the fact that the Chancellor has made raising productivity, and therefore growth, his main task. The urgency of the task is only amplified by the scary inflation that we are currently experiencing. He is absolutely right to emphasise that as the central purpose of his chancellorship. In his excellent opening speech, the Chief Secretary made the point that there are three pillars to the Chancellor's approach. I was going to mention five; I hope the number having gone up so quickly is not another sign of rapidly rising inflation.

On top of the pillars that the Chief Secretary mentioned, I would add and commend the idea, which was in the Queen's Speech, of spreading economic activity and opportunity all across the country. If all the UK was as productive as London and the south-east, UK GDP would be boosted by some £180 billion—as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) mentioned, many figures flying around today, but that is a very significant and simple one. We would all—all over the country—be significantly richer if we could make the less productive parts of the country as productive as the most productive parts. Therefore, those bits of the levelling-up Bill that are about spreading activity and opportunity are central to the success of our economic policy over the next couple of years. We may wish to return to the planning parts of that Bill in a later debate.

Skills, as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury mentioned, are essential, so I very much welcome the Schools Bill. School education is about much more than preparing for economic life, but consistently higher standards in our schools will give us a more productive workforce, and therefore greater wealth and, in the end, more leisure time. It is one of the bases on which we need to build not just a healthy society, but a healthy economy.

Science and technology, which my right hon. Friend did not mention, is the other element that I would add. Again, successive Governments, going back more than half a century—as far back as Harold Wilson—have emphasised the need to harness science more effectively to give us a long-term advantage in a competitive world. One thing we have learned over those many decades is that it needs to be done in a focused way. In that regard, the genetic technology Bill is particularly welcome. It



[*Damian Green*]

covers one specific, but hugely important, area in which we ought to have an international advantage and that we should wish to exploit.

My right hon. Friend mentioned infrastructure. In a week in which we have seen Crossrail operating, we should all celebrate the fact that we can, even if slightly belatedly, build grand projects in this country. I hope that the transport Bill, when we see the details of it, will encourage not just Government activity but innovation, which is hugely important and the fifth point that my right hon. Friend mentioned. Innovation is the most difficult thing to legislate for. It requires an attitude of mind, a culture, that grows from a tax system that encourages risk taking, an education system that provides the necessary skills, and the opportunities for people to make a difference, particularly in their own area.

**Nadia Whittome:** On that point, does the right hon. Member agree that climate education in schools—from primary through to secondary and vocational courses—is essential if we are to meet our legally binding targets of net zero by 2050?

**Damian Green:** I am sure that, like me, the hon. Lady spends a lot of time visiting schools in her constituency. I am struck not only by the standard of teaching in that area, but by the enthusiasm and engagement of young people on that issue, which is very important.

I am afraid, however, that the Government's legislative proposals threaten to take us in the wrong direction in another innovative sector in which Britain is world class: the creative industries. Any Government would want to support, encourage, and, above all, listen to those industries when considering the future, but in that regard I have reservations about the media Bill. The Government's own White Paper on broadcasting, "Up Next", which was published last month, says:

"The UK's creative economy is a global success story, and our public service broadcasters (PSBs) are the beating heart of that success. They produce great British content loved across the UK and the world over. The government wants it to stay that way."

Good, so do I, and so do millions of people who value the BBC, Channel 4, as well as ITV and Channel 5; they all do a good job. What worries me, looking at the White Paper and the announcements made, is that the Government's warm words are not matched by sympathetic actions. Let us take Channel 4 first. The Government had a consultation. There was an overwhelming desire to keep the ownership situation as it is, and that was ignored. In ignoring the consultation, the Government have argued that Channel 4 needs borrowing powers so that, in the end, it does not have to rely for borrowing on the state. Channel 4 has come up with a suggestion for a joint venture that would enable it to stay with its current ownership regime, but still access private capital. That was ignored. Instead, the Government insist on carrying on with privatisation.

If we care about a successful sector—the creative sector is successful and the many small businesses that make programmes for Channel 4 are particularly successful—we should listen to it when it tells us how best to strengthen it for the future. As a Conservative, I find it extraordinary that we have a Conservative Government who are saying, "The gentleman from Whitehall knows best" and that they are deciding how

best to run this part of the sector, ignoring the small businesses that make it up. I thought that listening to small business was a core Conservative aim, but we seem not to be doing so.

Let us go from the abstract to the concrete. If this legislation goes through, which I hope it does not, Channel 4 could be bought by a big US player, in which case let us look in five years' time at how much quirky, different, and innovative UK-based content is being made for Channel 4, particularly as it happens outside London and the south-east, outside the traditional broadcasting areas. It is also possible that ITV will buy it, which will mean a reduction in competition in the TV advertising market. Again, speaking as a Conservative, I thought that competition was one thing that we believed in and wanted to encourage.

Beyond Channel 4, the Government plan to move onto the BBC. They are rightly consulting on the future funding of this hugely important national institution, but it is slightly difficult to take a consultation seriously when, at the outset, the Secretary of State has announced her conclusion, which is that the licence fee has had its day. It is an arguable position, but it is unarguable that it makes the whole consultation look like a sham. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, of which I am a member, looked at this issue last year and, broadly speaking, concluded that for all the disadvantages that it has—we know what they are—the licence fee was the least bad option for the coming years. Let us have a proper debate on this hugely important and complex issue, and not a sham consultation where the verdict has been given before the evidence has been considered. Again, let us listen to the voices of those who have made our creative sectors such a big economic contributor to the country and something to be really proud of in modern Britain.

In conclusion, there is very much that I welcome in the Queen's Speech, but I hope the Government will listen on some issues, because, otherwise, there is a danger of stifling growth in one of our best economic sectors. Britain needs a thriving creative sector and the creative industries need a Government who will support and nurture them by creating a regulatory climate in which they can thrive, creating jobs and wealth, and also experiences and memories that the British people will share with each other. I am sure that this House will help the Government achieve that end.

2.37 pm

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): This morning, the Foreign Secretary said:

"We are in a very, very difficult economic situation".

We all recognise that that is true. Although there are some things that no Government can control, I encourage Ministers to reflect a little more on some of the difficulties that they have brought upon themselves and British business.

In his speech, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury somehow neglected to mention the fact that our goods trade with the European Union since January 2021 has had to contend with red tape, bureaucracy and costs, including transport costs, which the Government have dumped on British business via the deal that they concluded. We know that we have small and medium-sized companies that are struggling to export to the EU. The right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) talked

about the importance of the cultural sector, but we know that musicians and performing artists face visa applications and customs declarations, which they find incompatible with trying to tour in Europe.

We know that farmers are suffering from a shortage of labour. On Monday, when I was in Kent—I am co-convenor of the UK Trade and Business Commission—I talked to a fruit farmer. He said that, last year, he could not pick 8% of his crop. What has he done this year? He is reducing the amount that he plants. What does that do for British food security? It has benefits for other countries that are growing more, but it is making it harder for British farmers to grow more here.

While businesses are having to cope with all that cost, the Government have for the fourth time postponed checks on EU businesses exporting into the United Kingdom, so they face less of the checks and costs that the Government have just dumped on to British businesses. The Office for Budget Responsibility, as Members will know, says that the UK has,

“missed out on much of the recovery in global trade”.

According to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, the number of UK businesses exporting goods to the EU fell by an astonishing 33% last year compared with the year before. That is mainly small businesses that have said, “We can’t be bothered with all of this. We’re giving up exporting.” How does that help economic recovery?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** The right hon. Gentleman is making a strong point, and I am not a remoaner in any shape or form, but of the Bank of England’s evidence to the Treasury Committee this week, the evidence from the Governor of the Bank of England, his written evidence or the minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee meetings on the labour shortages the UK faces, not a single one mentioned Brexit. Why does the right hon. Gentleman think that is? Is it not the case that we must confront the brutal facts if we are going to solve some of these problems?

**Hilary Benn:** I can only report what I was told by the farmer on Monday. He has relied over the years on workers who have come from eastern Europe, and he says, “They’re just not coming in the same numbers, and that’s why I can’t pick my crops.” That is the point I am making.

**Harriett Baldwin:** The right hon. Gentleman had the pleasure, as I did, of having lunch with some senators who were visiting here from France. I believe he was at the very conversation where they said how difficult it was for them too to find seasonal agricultural workers, because of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

**Hilary Benn:** Undoubtedly, disentangling the impact of the pandemic and other factors is continuing work; the Office for National Statistics makes that point when it publishes the statistics. However, there is no doubt at all that the change in the visa regime being operated by the Home Office now is having an impact on British farmers, and that was the point I was trying to make. I long for the day when these things—

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Hilary Benn:** Very quickly, because of the time constraints.

**Matt Rodda:** My right hon. Friend is making an excellent point. I have been given the same feedback by small businesses. Does he agree that there is also a serious connection between the rising cost of food and the lack of labour for British farms, and that that particular area could be driving inflation?

**Hilary Benn:** There is no doubt that if we put more costs, bureaucracy, red tape and increased transport costs on businesses, prices will increase. That is one of the ways businesses cope. Those things need to be sorted out but, as long as there is no trust between the European Union and the United Kingdom, it is frankly not going to happen.

The principal cause of that distrust is the stand-off over the Northern Ireland protocol, which is the other issue I want to raise. We have two problems. One is that the Northern Ireland Government is not functioning and the second is that the Northern Ireland protocol is not working. The Good Friday agreement and the power-sharing and peace it has brought cannot be jeopardised by trade problems caused by the protocol.

It is extremely tempting to dwell on the miserable history of how we got here—how the Prime Minister moved from promising that he would never put a border in the Irish sea to promptly doing so when he became the occupant of No. 10, and then to describing it as “a great deal” for Northern Ireland—but, in all honesty, the Prime Minister’s failings and inconsistencies are not a reason to inflict damage on Northern Ireland or on the British economy when so many people are struggling.

We all knew that leaving the European Union would create difficulties over Ireland. The only thing everyone agreed on—practically the only thing—was that there could be no return to a hard border. That is why the most important part of the protocol talked about goods at risk, and this is at the heart of the debate: goods at risk, having entered Northern Ireland, of going into the European Union, as opposed to goods that are going to stay in Northern Ireland. That was never defined, and the joint committee was given the task of dealing with it.

We have a stand-off at the moment. In one way, that stand-off could just be extended and extended and the Government could continue to prolong the grace periods—unlawfully, as per the protocol—with the EU starting legal action and staying it while they try to negotiate. That is one way of dealing with it. In fairness, the EU moved on medicines, and I praise Maroš Šefčovič for that. He changed EU law to allow NHS patients in Northern Ireland to get NHS medicines, which is pretty obvious really.

I said to Mr Šefčovič on Thursday, when he appeared before the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, “Thanks for doing that, but if you can move on that, can you not move on other things as well?” We all know the list of remaining problem areas: seed potatoes, parcels, guide dogs, supermarket deliveries to shops, organic food and divergence on the use of titanium dioxide, an ingredient in cakes and ice cream that I was not previously aware of. The EU proposals would provide more checks and problems than the current stand-off, and it is important to recognise that.

[Hilary Benn]

I say to the Government, as I said to the Foreign Secretary yesterday, that threatening to disapply the protocol will not work. In the end, it will result in retaliation. If retaliation results in further obstacles to trade or, heaven forbid, a trade war, that will make the cost of living crisis even worse. We have a real war in Europe going on; we do not need a trade war with our biggest trading partner.

At the same time, the EU needs to understand that it has to move to help to bring this crisis to an end. If one takes those supermarkets that sell only to shops in Northern Ireland, what exactly is the risk to the integrity of the single market from a sandwich, a cake or a chicken—I speak as a vegetarian—that is bought in a supermarket in Strabane or Belfast? Can anyone point, in the 16 months the grace period has operated, to a single example where the integrity of the single market has been damaged? I am not aware of any. There is a problem with divergence, but I hope that a way of mutually recognising each other's food production standards arrangements can come.

In conclusion, this crisis arises from a practical problem and it requires a practical solution. That is what politics is meant to deliver. That is our job. We need patient diplomacy and negotiation that takes as its starting point the purpose of the rules—they are there for a purpose—rather than the rules themselves and applies that to the unique and particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. Could we have less squabbling and more cool heads? Could we have less escalation and more conciliation? My message to both sides in the partnership council is a simple one: “You’ve got the power to deal with this. Sort it out.”

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Just a gentle reminder that my guidance was seven minutes. I call Chris Grayling.

2.47 pm

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker; I will endeavour to fulfil that.

The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) is right about conciliation, but it is noticeable that the European Union is preventing the United Kingdom from participating in Horizon Europe, while allowing the Israelis to do so. That does not feel to me like an awful lot of good will from their side, and that is to be regretted.

I rise to support the Queen's Speech. As we focus on economic growth, these are extraordinary and difficult times for our economy. We have had in this country to deal with an unprecedented series of problems, and so have our Ministers—something the Opposition often forget as they throw brickbats at them.

We now know from the World Health Organisation that the Government and the country handled the tragic circumstances of the pandemic pretty well. Many countries suffered and so did we, but we were far from being the bad performer that has been suggested. We also forget the continued impact of the pandemic in China, where there are severe lockdowns still. That is causing an economic ripple effect that contributes to the inflation problems we face. The sad reality is that when oil prices,

food prices and the cost of household energy soar, those things are outside the control of any individual Government and there are few Governments that can wave a wand and solve them.

I am pretty supportive of much of what this Government have done and how they have gone about dealing with the range of issues that have arisen, but I make one simple point to the Minister and his colleagues: we cannot achieve growth by over-taxing our economy. The decisions that have been taken on tax have been taken, but the direction of travel needs to change, and soon.

We also need to step up our incentivisation of investment. If we are to deal with the huge energy challenges this country faces, we must do more. That means continuing our dramatic progress on wind and solar power; it means, I suspect, looking again at tidal energy and it means developing hydrogen. It must be said that we would be in a much more difficult position if this Government and the coalition Government before them had not placed such emphasis on renewables. That was clearly the right thing to do. However, we also need more domestic production of gas. There are those who say we should stop all fossil fuel projects now. I take completely the opposite view.

As the world rightly moves away from coal, something needs to take its place. Countries that have been dependent on coal are not suddenly going to make a complete switch to renewables or zero-emission nuclear power stations overnight, so gas, which is the cleanest of the fossil fuels, must be a short-term priority for us. Indeed, it is the move away from coal in parts of Asia that started the gas price surge in the first place. It is pretty clear that the world does not at the moment have enough gas for the transition to net zero, particularly as we deal with the consequences of the war in Ukraine, so we will see prices continue to remain high unless we deal with supply issues.

That is why it makes absolute sense—the Government are right to be supporting this—to have additional extraction of gas from the North sea. Frankly, we would be in dereliction of our duty if we did not look again at the potential to use shale gas to help us through. To those who say, “No more UK production”, I just say this: the emissions from a tanker of gas from Qatar are roughly twice those of a similar consignment from the North sea. I want to cut emissions. I also believe that we need a steady transition to net zero by 2050—but it is a transition. Burning fuel that generates twice the emissions makes no sense. Gas is a key part of our transition to net zero, and the more it can be produced in the UK, the lower our emissions will be. We also need to move rapidly on nuclear, and I welcome the Government's commitment to that as well. We cannot achieve net zero without it.

Let me turn to the environment and conservation. If I have a disappointment in this Queen's Speech, it is that the legislation on conservation I was hoping for has slipped beyond this Session. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency, who is in his place will make sure that it comes back in the next Session. We urgently need to take forward the progress we have made but also to put in place a modernised framework for wildlife protection in this country. For example, it makes no sense to have expansive protections in place for newts, which are numerous here, but not for creatures such as



the hedgehog that have declined so much. I have pushed for the hedgehog to have greater legal protection and I look forward to this happening in the next Session, at least. But there are steps that can be taken now. When the levelling-up Bill comes before the House, I will table an amendment, if the Government have not already acted, to require a full wildlife survey of every development site, and if vulnerable species are found, there should be a legal duty to relocate them to an appropriate habitat elsewhere. No more should we tolerate developers cutting down all the trees on the site and clearing all the foliage, turning it into a wasteland, before they have even applied for, let alone secured, planning consent. We need growth, and we need more houses, but a cavalier approach to local wildlife cannot be the consequence.

In this Session I will continue to push Ministers to go further and faster on bottom trawling in marine protected areas. We have made a start in the first few areas, but there is much further to go. This is a really important of protecting our ecology. Having stronger environmental protections in our seas is one of the benefits that is deliverable now that we have left the European Union. It would not have been possible while we were still EU members.

Turning to broader issues on conservation, I applaud Ministers for the work they are doing internationally, and particularly what Lord Goldsmith is doing to support the Congo Basin. The leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) on COP26 and its aftermath has been exemplary. One of the key moments of the coming Session will be the negotiations at the Convention on Biological Diversity summit this year. I want the UK to play a key role in delivering what is needed—a renewed international drive on species protection and habitat restoration. WWF estimates that the amount of degraded land internationally where deforestation followed by over-farming has taken place is the size of South America. If we are going to tackle climate change, protect endangered species and deal with a global food shortage, we need to start recovering this land, restoring it for wildlife in some areas or properly managed agriculture in others, with a particular focus on creating sustainable livelihoods for the people in those areas. Our Ministers need to make sure that we set a path towards those goals as we finish our year of COP presidency and take part in the CBD discussions.

There is a lot to do in terms of a growing economy, the move towards net zero, and doing our bit internationally to secure a proper future for all our environments. I am glad to support a Government who, in my view, have made a good start, but there is still a lot to do.

2.54 pm

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): This is a Queen's Speech that provides mediocre answers to the wrong questions. The Government acknowledge that there is a cost of living crisis, but they do not want to do anything about it. They acknowledge that there is a housing crisis, but they are not willing to control rent so that people can afford to live in their homes. They acknowledge that energy is expensive. But do they want to talk about meaningful price caps? Do they want to talk about retrofitting or insulation? Did they vote in favour of a windfall tax to lower bills when they had the opportunity yesterday? No, no and no.

This is a Government who tell us they want action on the climate crisis, and then, when a protest movement comes along to demand just that, introduce legislation to have them sent to jail. They want to invest, they tell us, in the future. But the Conservatives have been in power for 12 years and they have cut the public sector to shreds. Wages will be lower in 2025 than they were in 2008, when I was 12 years old. Since they came to power, the number of people on zero-hours contracts has risen more than fivefold. All of this happened on their watch—and are they going to reverse it? No.

In 2010, the Trussell Trust handed out 48,000 food parcels. Last year, it handed out 2.1 million. Meanwhile, Britain gained a record number of billionaires, between them owning £597 billion—about triple the annual operating budget of the NHS. That is the dynamism of the market for you—the kind of dynamism that makes an elderly lady sit on the bus all day to keep warm because she cannot afford to heat her home. We need a publicly owned energy system that delivers cheap, green energy; an above-inflation rise in the minimum wage; at least the restoration of the £20 universal credit, but really a reversal of all the benefit cuts since 2010; and rent controls.

Finally, I would like to address the disgrace of explicitly excluding trans people from the so-called ban on conversion therapy. Once again, the Government acknowledge that there is a problem, but will they extend the protection of the law to those who need it most—young trans people, half of whom have attempted suicide by the time they reach the age of 26? No. So transphobic parents will still be able to hire someone to psychologically abuse their child in an attempt to stop them being trans, and this practice will still be perfectly legal. What kind of message does that send to young trans people fighting to survive? We need a Government who are on the right side of history, but instead we have a Government of pound-shop authoritarians made on the playing fields of Eton and in the *Daily Mail's* wildest dreams. They know there is a problem, but what they cannot do is recognise the truth—that the problem is them.

2.57 pm

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): It is appropriate that I am following the quite passionate speech by the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) about the conversion therapy Bill. I broadly welcome the Queen's Speech and the Government's legislative programme. I was always in favour of some kind of legislation about conversion therapy, but the more I have looked at the issue, the less and less happy I am that there should be such a Bill, not because I am in favour of conversion therapy, but because I cannot see that legislation is either necessary or desirable. I am ready to be proved wrong, but I can think of no coercive behaviour that it would ban that is not already illegal. This Bill will be used to stoke exactly the kind of bitter disputes about transsexuality that we need to resolve before we legislate next in this field. Again, I am happy to be proved wrong—let us see the Bill—but we could have done with some pre-legislative scrutiny of such a Bill.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Although conversion therapy and, indeed, hedgehogs are both fascinating subjects, in terms of achieving economic growth, does my hon. Friend agree that what the

[Richard Graham]

Government are doing on levelling-up funds and bringing investment that can act as a catalyst for further investment in great small cities such as Gloucester will help to create jobs, footfall and retail—all the things that people in our country value—in order to have the opportunities to bring about that growth?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, but we should recognise that these issues of conversion therapy and transsexuality are very important to certain sections of society. They need to be addressed, but we need to be sure that we address them in the right way.

**Geraint Davies:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I will, but I do not want to give way too often because we are not time-limited.

**Geraint Davies:** Some years ago, I brought forward a Bill on the regulation of psychotherapists, which recommended banning conversion therapy. There was a conference that 100 conversion therapists attended, so this is a widespread and abhorrent practice. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those who say that transsexuality should not be included seem to be those who think that people would go through the process of becoming a transwoman in order to rape another woman? There are a lot of male rapists out there. It seems to be a lot of effort for someone to have their head kicked in by other men. Transgender people should be included in the Bill.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I had not intended to make a great speech about this subject. I note the point that the hon. Gentleman has made and I wish to move on.

I welcome the forthcoming legislation to protect the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. I say to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who spoke a few moments ago, that perhaps we agree a great deal about the future of the Northern Ireland protocol. The question is whether we can make it happen unless we have some legislation coming down the track as well, because the EU has not changed its mandate.

I want to concentrate today on much more immediate challenges. Covid supply chain disruption persists in many parts of the world, notably China, and now we have Russia's dreadful war against Ukraine, which frankly has shattered the geopolitical order that we have become used to for decades. We all used to believe in what the Germans called, "Wandel durch Handel"—the mistaken faith that nations that trade together would never go to war with each other. President Putin has smashed that confidence.

Business and Governments are reducing their exposure to dependency on all autocratic regimes. That is throwing globalisation into reverse, creating massive price increases and shortages. Poorer nations are acting to keep their food affordable for their own people. For example, India has just banned wheat exports, following Indonesia, which banned palm oil exports. We have an acute, growing and potentially far greater energy supply crisis in Europe. Europe cannot continue to rely on supply from Russia. This crisis requires a vast reorganisation of Europe's energy supply and trading arrangements,

and this massive adjustment will take years and is unprecedented. Only major food and energy producers in the world, such as Canada and the US, will avoid the worst kind of recession.

At least the United Kingdom can produce some of our own gas and oil and can continue to expand renewables, but why are we pumping our surplus gas out to Europe this warm spring to fill EU storage capacity, when we should be filling our own? The Government shut it down, and we need to reopen our gas storage capacity as quickly as possible. I fervently hope that we can achieve net zero by 2050 without excessive cost. The Government are right to see gas as the essential transition fuel, but why import gas when we can produce our own more cheaply?

Meanwhile, we must all recognise the cost of living crisis—yes, crisis. Even before today's shock rise in CPI to 9%, the Commons Library had given me striking projections for the effect of this crisis on households. The full-year cost of just energy and food prices will rise by well over £1,000 a year for the lowest 20% of households by income and by £1,500 a year for pensioner households. A summer package to rescue the most vulnerable households is needed to avoid real financial distress and personal anguish and to support the economic demand of the most vulnerable households, or we will be creating possibly a worse recession than is already expected.

I welcome the suggestion in *The Times* today that the Government are considering a package. The spring statement represented peacetime thinking. Like after the unforeseen covid crisis, the Treasury must adapt to this unexpected war in Europe and accept that this new global energy and economic crisis also requires a very substantial policy response. I have to say that is far greater than the £3 billion package that the Labour party has offered us, though I do not subscribe to the rest of its fiscal profligacy.

I suggest that the £20 uplift in universal credit should immediately be restored. The abolition of VAT on domestic fuel would abolish a regressive tax that hurts the poorest households the most. We can do that now we are outside the EU. The Government should abolish the green levies on energy bills and fund them from the Exchequer, as recommended by Professor Dieter Helm. The Government should provide pensioners and poorer families with the confidence they can afford to stay warm. We should double the warm home discount and treble the winter fuel payment.

This package would cost not £3 billion, but £13.5 billion from July in this current tax year, but that is still less than the recent tax increases we have seen, and it is about 0.6% of GDP and affordable. Now or later, we should also consider relief for middle-income households. The lower 40% of households will feel severe stress from energy and food costs alone. We could start reindexing tax thresholds, or more, and that would have the advantage of incentivising work and productivity.

I have watched Governments—and Oppositions, I think we saw it today—blindsided by their own commitment to outdated thinking and policies of the past. There is no excuse for another such episode. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary is right to sound cautious, but we can see what is coming, and I am confident that this Government will act as they must.

3.6 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Five thousand one hundred and fifty-six people were admitted to hospital between September last year and February this year with malnutrition in England alone. That is more than in the whole of 2010. The number of people being admitted with scurvy has doubled in the past 10 years, and we are meant to be the sixth, or sometimes the fifth, wealthiest country in the world. We have inflation running at 9%, and for the poorest families it is at 10.9%, because more of their money is spent on food and on energy, where inflation is higher. They are getting a rougher deal than anybody else. That is my constituents.

The Government answer so far is £200. They call it a gift, but it is not; it is a loan. It actually puts up next year's bills by even more. We also have the more than £1,000 cut from universal credit. The hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) is absolutely right: of course we should be restoring the £20 a week on universal credit, and we have to do more for pensioners who are on fixed incomes as well.

The Government have said, "Get a better paid job"—oh yes, it is easy, isn't it, just getting a better paid job—or they have told us, "Get a different job", or, "Get more hours." Well, it is just not that simple, especially if someone has caring responsibilities. Incidentally, one of the cheapest deals that the Government get is free carers in the country. The Government say, "Shop more carefully for value brands." Do Ministers honestly not understand how ordinary people do their shopping every week? That is what they have been doing for ages, and they are not deciding which brand; they are deciding whether to buy anything at all.

Drive around on a bus all day just so that you do not have to pay the electricity bill—that seemed to be the Prime Minister's answer just before the local elections. Now his new version is to cut the civil service by 91,000. Well, I guess there will be even fewer people sorting out the Passport Office. I do not know about anybody else's, but my office is inundated with people saying, "I've got to go to a funeral", or "I've got to go to a wedding", or, "I've got a holiday that's been planned and I won't get any of the money back if I don't have my passport by next Thursday, and I put the application in more than three months ago." I am sorry, but cutting civil servants by 91,000 does not always go well. The one that really amuses me is the Prime Minister's latest version, which is, "Let them eat foie gras." We are allowed to have foie gras because apparently it is not Conservative to stop people maltreating animals so as to get a more exciting diet.

I do not think this is a Gracious Speech. It is so flimsy, it barely counts as a gracious intervention, to be honest. It is so threadbare, it barely covers the Government's dignity. It is nothing more than a letting out of air. It is a tired sigh, a long yawn, a tedious exhalation, a great big meh of a Queen's Speech.

There is no plan, no project, no leadership, no ideas, no programme for Government in here. Some of the so-called Bills are little more than glorified clauses. Great Governments give us really significant legislative programmes—measures such as the Reform Act, the abolition of slavery Act, the NHS Act, the minimum wage Act. What do we get here? The Harbours (Seafarers' Remuneration) Bill. Of course it is good, but in relation

to P&O this is the definition of slamming the door shut after the horse has bolted. Why is there not a proper Bill that would ban fire and rehire in its totality?

There is a load of "Groundhog Day" Bills that were promised in last year's Queen's Speech and we are apparently meant to have completely forgotten, such as the High Speed Rail (Crewe—Manchester) Bill, which was promised last year but never happened, and the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill for 5G, which was also promised last year but never happened. I am really keen on the Bill to counter state threats, because we need to update the laws on espionage in this country, but that too was promised last year and never happened.

**Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Chris Bryant:** I will not, because I am looking forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman's speech later. I am sure it will be absolutely magnificent.

There is also a mental health Bill that was promised last year and still has not come into being. A long overdue Bill is the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill. I have been arguing for such a Bill for a long time. In 2018, there was an opportunity to introduce all the measures that I guess we might have by the end of this legislative Session, but Companies House still says on its website, "Companies House does not verify the accuracy of the information filed." So when we read that Boris Johnson Ltd was dissolved on 5 January 2021, we do not know whether that is true. We might like it to be true, but we do not know whether it is. Nor, for that matter, do we know for sure that Big Boris's Bouncing Bonanza Ltd was dissolved on 1 February 2022. It is listed on Companies House, but we do not know whether it is true.

Where is the Bill on seizing assets? It is great that we freeze assets of those who are sanctioned for their participation, involvement or engagement in Putin's regime, but there is no provision to seize assets, which is what we really need to do and which other countries are doing.

There are all the twaddle Bills—complete and utter twaddle. My favourite is the Human Rights Bill, which either will be compliant with the European convention on human rights, in which case it is completely and utterly useless, or will not comply with the European convention, in which case it will presage the UK departing both the convention and the Council of Europe and is therefore an act of self-harm.

Then there is the Northern Ireland protocol Bill. I am really looking forward to the day when someone in the Government finds out who actually signed the Northern Ireland protocol. That is going to be a really good day. This is what I worry about: we have been preaching, quite rightly, to Vladimir Putin and President Xi about abiding by international law, yet barely a few years after we signed up to a treaty, we want to tear it up. The only person who is laughing about all this is President Putin.

We have the Bill to privatise Channel 4, coming from a Culture Secretary who did not know that Channel 4 does not receive public funds, who did not know that Channel 5 has always been a private body, and who told the Salvation Army magazine *The War Cry*,



[Chris Bryant]

“I am not an MP for any reason other than because God wants me to be... I am just a conduit for God”.

I have to say I worry about people like that bringing in legislation.

I do not think that this Queen’s Speech addresses any of the problems of my constituents. They are choosing between heating and eating, they worry about whether they will be able to pay the rent, they worry about their family—and we still have not addressed any of the issues in the NHS. I had cancer three years ago, and I was told that I probably had less than a year to live. I know how important early diagnosis is. At the beginning of covid, we had a 4.4 million backlog of people waiting for surgery; we now have a 6.1 million backlog, and still I see no answer to how they can get the treatment they need to save their lives. That is why I say this is a meh.

3.14 pm

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): It was interesting to listen to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Although I will not be joining him in the Lobby this evening to vote down the entirety of the Queen’s Speech, including the economic crime and corporate transparency Bill, which is what he is choosing to do, I will say that he made his points forcefully and well. However, I endorse the Chief Secretary’s comments when he ran through the range of important Bills that are included in the Queen’s Speech.

We were all shocked and taken aback today by the headline rate of inflation reaching 9%. It is a sobering moment, which many hon. Members have noted, so I start by saying that I think our Chancellor has been an unlucky Chancellor. He has had to face a pandemic, he has had to face war, and now, due to the consequences of that evil war, he has to face the inflation that is harming everyone in the United Kingdom in their pocket. None the less, I believe I am right in saying that my constituents feel very lucky that they have had this Chancellor throughout these difficult challenges, because he was so quick to provide help during the pandemic. The furlough scheme, the small business income support scheme and the culture recovery fund, to name just three, were gratefully received by constituents during the pandemic, and it is thanks to his plan for jobs that yesterday we saw the foundation of what we all want to achieve through economic growth: quite remarkably low unemployment in this country—the lowest since 1974.

There were other remarkable things in yesterday’s jobs announcements, such as a record high number of vacancies. I think I am right in saying that it is the first time the number of vacancies has exceeded the number of jobseekers in this country. The plan for jobs has worked well, as has the help the Chancellor gave throughout the pandemic, so today, as we face this high inflation rate, we are in a position to say that we have a strong job market.

It is also worth noting that this month marks the 25th anniversary of the independence of the Bank of England. I will strike a consensual note by saying that that was a really good policy decision. We must all reiterate the importance not only of the Bank of England’s independence, but of its achieving the 2% inflation mandate. It is incredibly important to our constituents that we have low inflation to form the foundation for achieving economic growth.

It might surprise Opposition Members to hear this, but I think a windfall tax—

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): Is a great idea.

**Harriett Baldwin:** Well, I think a windfall tax that helps the lowest-income households is the right approach, and that is the approach that the Government are already following. There is already a windfall tax on the oil and gas sector: whereas most corporations in this country pay 19% corporation tax, those in the oil and gas sector pay 30% corporation tax and 10% windfall tax on top of that. There has been a windfall to the Chancellor from the price of oil and gas having risen so much, and he has rightly spent that windfall on people in the lowest-income households. Just this week, people in council tax bands A to D in my constituency will receive a £150 cash grant in their bank accounts. In a couple of months’ time, in July, there will be a hike in the national insurance threshold that will put a further £330 a year into the pockets of those who pay national insurance. We have also heard about the £200 to smooth the impact on household bills.

I would urge every pensioner in this country on a low income to check whether they are entitled to pension credit. There are 850,000 pensioners in this country who are not claiming the pension credit they are entitled to. Can we all agree that we should encourage our constituents to claim that? It not only gives them extra cash, but means they get other benefits. There is the household support fund, which has been doubled to £1 billion. I would direct any of my constituents struggling with bills who reach out to me to ask about that fund. There is also the warm home discount, which has been increased and its eligibility has been widened. These measures are important and targeted at the lowest-income households, unlike a 5% across-the-board cut in VAT on fuel bills that would most benefit those who live in the biggest houses.

In conclusion, it does not matter how much bad luck the world has thrown at us—I think the Chancellor has been unlucky—because by doing the right thing, we can make the luck that will be a strong foundation for achieving economic growth.

3.21 pm

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): It is a pleasure to speak in this Queen’s Speech debate, just as it was a pleasure to see Her Majesty yesterday at the opening of the Elizabeth line, our new railway line through London. As the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) has mentioned, it has overrun on both time and budget, but the small upside is that Her Majesty got to open the line that bears her name during her jubilee celebrations.

The line itself, with its innovation and infrastructure, the opportunity it has provided for thousands of young people to develop their skills and the level of ambition it shows for economic growth in this country, is actually a much better tribute to Her Majesty than the speech delivered in Parliament in her name last week. We are here today to talk about how that speech achieves economic growth, and I am afraid to say that there was really very little in it at all. I think we all know and accept that economic growth, particularly at this time, is absolutely vital to support not just our small and

medium-sized businesses, but all the organisations that support employment and entrepreneurship across this country.

Yesterday, we saw the unemployment figures at their lowest levels since 1974. Conservative Members, not least the Prime Minister earlier today, have highlighted that that is a good thing, which it undoubtedly is. However, we also saw that, for the first time ever, there are more vacancies across the UK economy than there are people looking for work. I think we have to look at the serious implications of that, because it is going to be a real brake on growth. If we cannot fill those vacancies and businesses cannot get people into the skilled jobs they need to push forward, grow, create opportunities and provide economic growth, that is really going to hold this country back. So it is quite a serious issue as well as being some cause for celebration, as some people have said.

One thing to highlight—everyone has been saying this—is that we are now facing 9% inflation. That means wage growth, but greater wage growth acceleration in the private sector than in the public sector, as I am seeing in my constituency. I was on a visit to Kingston Hospital the other day, and I was told that its biggest issue right now is being able to discharge patients out of hospital and back home. However, it cannot discharge patients because it cannot get them care packages, and it cannot get them care packages because people do not want to work in care for very low wages when they can get better wages working in hospitality or retail. So we need to concede that there is perhaps a dark side, as it were, to the unemployment figures, and that is really going to inhibit growth.

Another thing we are beginning to see is that we are not trading to the extent of some of our partners across the world. According to the OBR, the UK has become a less trade-intensive economy. By the fourth quarter of 2021, UK exports remained around 12% below pre-pandemic levels, and trade as a share of GDP has fallen by around 12% since 2019—2.5% more than any other country in the G7. The Government pledged in the Queen's Speech to

“continue to champion international trade, delivering jobs across the country and growing the economy”,

yet trade is declining and there is no determined plan for growth. They have talked about their free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, but we have highlighted on several occasions the potentially negative impact that they will have on British farming, and I do not think that the British Government are really listening to the concerns of farmers on this issue.

In my constituency of Richmond Park, businesses are telling me about the multiple barriers they face to trade that are having a direct negative impact on their ability to grow. A very successful and popular restaurant in Richmond town centre called Don Fernando's has closed after 32 years because of myriad issues, not least the high cost of importing the food and drink from Spain on which it relied to deliver its high-quality Spanish cuisine. A drinks company has had complications with customs checks, with a complete lack of support or advice from HMRC, which left its goods in quarantine for almost three months. Obviously, any kind of food and drinks trader cannot operate when facing such delays and with fresh food or drinks being kept for that length of time. The Government really need to get on

board with some of the issues being thrown up by Brexit red tape and customs checks, and they really need to work hard to unlock some of these problems if they want to support our small and medium-sized enterprises.

I want to highlight my disappointment that there was not more in the Queen's Speech about insulation. We have talked a lot today about fuel prices, and that is a very real anxiety for many households across the country. We all know that one way of tackling that is to get to grips with some of our very poor housing stock, which obviously our low-income families are particularly impacted by. We need to see a great deal more from this Government to support households, particularly social housing tenants and their housing providers, to improve insulation and so improve energy efficiency in our housing. If we really got to grips with that now and launched a big drive right across the country, particularly for low-income families, think of the difference we could make when those fuel bills really begin to rack up in the autumn and winter. We could do that if we were really serious about it.

This is about not just the fuel bills our constituents are facing now and are dreading in the winter, but the Government's net zero commitment, because we want to reduce carbon emissions and households are a serious contributor to them. We really need to get to grips with that issue if we are to meet our net zero commitments. I was interested to find that there are 1,690 installer businesses that meet the requirements to participate in Government schemes. There is such a great opportunity here for improving innovation, entrepreneurship and skills training right across the country, and the Government need to put some serious money and some serious thought into that as soon as they possibly can.

Finally, like other Members, I really welcome the mental health Bill, but I want to see a lot more from the Government to recognise the scale of the issue. The No. 1 problem in my constituency is access to health services of all kinds, and I am hearing concerns from constituents about dentistry, surgical procedures and GP appointments, but my experience is that the most critical issue is access to mental health services. The impact on our children of the pandemic and lockdown has been profound, and we are failing them if we do not get to grips with that impact. That impact is felt by our very youngest citizens, who were deprived of some of their early years of schooling and have so much socialisation and learning in a classroom to catch up on, and who face separation anxiety from their parents, as well as our teens and young adults, who have spent some of their critical socialising years in their bedrooms and are finding it difficult to reconnect with everyday society, especially as they move from school to whatever they are moving on to. They are finding it hard to move to university, training, further education or employment because they have missed out on some of that critical development.

I want to see the Government do a great deal more. I have multiple cases of constituents waiting for treatment. I have a young girl aged just 12 who was referred to children and adolescent mental health services in March 2021. Thirteen months later, she is still awaiting treatment. Her parents are absolutely desperate. She has been hospitalised twice and repeatedly sent home from school due to suicide attempts. Schools are under increased

[Sarah Olney]

pressure and are struggling to cope with complex mental health needs and the sharp rise in those presenting higher levels of risk. The Liberal Democrats are calling for a dedicated qualified mental health professional in every school to provide first-level support for young people and also to help teachers struggling to deal with this issue.

There are multiple ways in which we need to respond to the challenges of our current economy and society, and I am afraid to say that the Queen's Speech has failed in all these things. I urge the Government to do more on these issues.

3.30 pm

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am delighted to be called in this debate. I want to talk about three areas in my seven minutes: the economy, general practice, and skills and schools.

Yesterday I was delighted to receive the very good news from the House of Commons Library that unemployment had fallen by 1,725 in the year to April in my constituency. Every one of those people is an individual, able to contribute to a household budget and help with the family finances. Sometimes I do not think we realise what a jobs miracle this country's economy has been over the years. In the middle of the last decade, the United Kingdom was creating more jobs than the whole of the rest of the European Union put together. That is an amazing jobs creation record. The fact that the economy is still enabling those jobs to be produced after the covid shock and the Ukraine shock is quite incredible. I pay tribute to all businesses large and small, and to Government policy, for enabling that to happen.

What is happening in Ukraine is having a consequence on people's cost of living. One thinks of the storehouses in Odesa, full of grain that could go around the world to feed hungry people and that would help grain prices to come down and help us in the United Kingdom. However, because of the evil action of the Putin regime, that is not allowed to happen. Ukraine is also the world's fourth largest producer of ammonia and fertiliser, which is having a huge impact on the problems that our farmers are facing.

I am also acutely conscious that housing, particularly in my constituency and large parts of the south-east, is a mammoth part of people's outgoings. There is a lot of talk at the moment, quite understandably, about increasing energy and food costs. In my part of the world, it is not unusual for people's rent to be two thirds of their income. That is simply not sustainable. It is really tough for people on lower incomes in high housing cost areas. We need to confront that. I know that the Prime Minister and the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary get that, and in my view this issue at the heart of poverty issues in large parts of the south.

As has been pointed out for years by the British architect Bill Dunster OBE, the architect of Portcullis House—if that does not put those of my colleagues who have offices there off him—it is possible to build zero-energy-bill homes that sell back more energy to the grid than they draw down. Those homes would not have gas and electricity bills, which would be fantastic for our greenhouse gas emission targets and the huge energy

shock that is causing so much worry and concern for many of our constituents. I know that we are reducing carbon in new homes by 70%, but I would encourage the Government to go further and faster in this area.

I note the £22 billion and the £83 billion in debt interest, but I was pleased to hear the Chancellor say yesterday:

“we will do more to support the most vulnerable”.—[*Official Report*, 17 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 585.]

That is absolutely right, and I look forward to seeing the details, particularly for the disabled and pensioners. Given the Chancellor's record in getting the country through covid, I know that he will not disappoint in that area.

**Richard Graham:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the statistic that emerged yesterday—that we have increased the number of people with disabilities in employment to 1.3 million, after setting a target of 1 million in 2017, which we have achieved within five years—is astonishing and the result of hard work by many people, including the applicants themselves?

**Andrew Selous:** I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. There is a wonderful Indian employer in my constituency who calls his disabled staff “differently abled”. That is a wonderful way to put it, because they have amazing gifts to bring. Often, employers will say that they are some of the most hard working and dedicated, which is why our disability confident campaign, which has clearly been successful, is so important, so I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point.

Secondly, I am focusing in particular on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and what it needs to do, and I want to raise the appalling difficulty that many of us on both sides of the House have in getting sufficient additional general practice capacity where there are huge new housing developments. We are a country that generally does public administration and planning well—for example, I rarely come across a child who does not have a school place—because we have brilliant civil servants and brilliant local authority officers. However, I must say that a major exception is general practice, where the system is not working well. I ask my Front-Bench colleagues please to note that and take it back across Government.

There is an alphabet soup of different places to go to try to get a health hub or extra GP surgeries. One could try section 106 or the community infrastructure levy. One might be lucky with the housing infrastructure fund. Perhaps one's local authority—or even Government capital from the Treasury to the Department of Health and Social Care—will come to the rescue. It is complicated and uncertain, and we are not serving our constituents well in ensuring that general practice capacity is available. I have 14,000 new houses being built, which will help with the housing issues that I mentioned, but that is more than 36,000 new residents coming to my area for which we must have the general practice capacity. I will keep campaigning on that issue until it is resolved.

I turn to the Schools Bill. The Government are doing lots of good things in schools and skills, and never has that been more important. I am pleased to report to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that the Church of England is particularly pleased with the Bill. Why is that significant? The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church run a third of the schools in England, so it is a big stakeholder. The Bishop of Durham and



Nigel Genders, our chief education officer, have said how pleased they are and that they have extremely good co-operation with the Secretary of State for Education, which they are delighted with. They think they can do a lot more together. I like what we are doing on lifetime skills. T-levels are really important. There is a little more work to do on apprenticeships, but what we are doing on employer representative bodies is absolutely right.

I have a particular issue with computer numerical control operators in my area as engineering businesses are screaming to get hold of them. I am working closely with the Bedford College Group on that, which we must press through. Those jobs pay about £48,000 a year, so it is not right that we cannot get people to do them. The skills Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart)—is coming to Houghton Regis on 6 June and I look forward to his visit.

3.37 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Gracious Speech the other day was most memorable for being a Queen's Speech without a Queen. It was also an agenda from a Government without clear direction, flailing around in their 12th year. As the Institute for Government said,

“it reads like a manifesto aimed at the party base more than a realistic programme.”

That is what we get when we have an Administration diverted from the real issues of the day by self-preservation. While 38 Bills is, on the face of it, a frenetic level of legislation—it is the most in almost a decade and four times that of the last Queen's Speech—when we strip away the bits that are reheated leftovers that the Government could not get through the Lords last time and the bits and pieces that will scrap EU regulations, we see that, paradoxically, it is a very thin speech. It is a scattergun of afterthoughts, and it puts off all the really big decisions.

When, the other day, the Prime Minister had a go at our hard-working civil service by saying that it had a *mañana* culture—I am told that the word translates as “tomorrow”—he seemed to identify that his own Government have been gripped with putting everything into a “too difficult for right now” box to be dealt with tomorrow. Although the words “cost of living crisis” were included in the speech's text, it was missing any big, overarching ideas for dealing with the crippling of household finances when it comes to the weekly shop, leaving the lights on, heating the house or filling up the tank. The Government's answer for when they might deal with any of the above, or the record inflation that we see today, is some ill-defined date in the future, but the problem is now.

Take the flagship pledge to ban buy-one-get-one-free on junk food—again, kicked into the long grass. I do not know if that is because the Conservatives are not into the nanny state or whether it was nanny who told them to do it. Whatever it is, it just reeks of timidity. The whole thing is like a bad episode of “Neighbours”, where we have No. 10 and No. 11 at war with each other. The only thing they are agreed on is that if you break the law you can get away with it—you don't have to resign.

From the content of the Queen's Speech, we would not know that we are in the midst of a European war, that we are coming out of a global pandemic with a spluttering economy edging perilously close to recession, or that we are in a climate crisis. Instead, what do we have? Ideological hobby horses and populist posturing. We have a higher education Bill consisting of student number controls and a lifelong loan entitlement—more dumbing down than levelling up. Then there is the freedom of speech Bill roundly condemned by everyone in the higher education sector. That is what you get when you have had enough of experts. There is a Bill to curb Insulate Britain, but nothing that would actually help to insulate Britain's homes. With high streets increasingly boarded up and turning into cash deserts, it is shameful that food bank usage is rocketing but that in Acton banks are an extinct species. TSB has now gone in Ealing, which is going the same way.

Faced with crises at home and abroad, what is the Government's priority? It is to privatise the widely respected Channel 4, which costs us all not a penny. It is a solution to which there is no problem. The proposal is condemned by prominent Conservatives, such as the former Culture Secretary who is now the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), and the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), a former deputy Prime Minister, who is no longer in his place, so even their own side do not like it. It was not even in the Conservative manifesto and it looks like revenge. Members might remember that that was promised when the Prime Minister did not turn up to the Channel 4 election debate and he was replaced with an ice sculpture.

We now have a Bill for BO—the laughably titled Brexit opportunities Bill—with more dead ends and might-have-beens, and more re-writing of history all over. The Prime Minister trumpeted removing VAT on domestic energy during the referendum campaign. His exact words were:

“When we vote leave, we will be able to scrap this unfair and damaging tax.”

The country obliged, but six years on, in the middle of an energy price crisis, nothing. Then there is the manifesto pledge that Brexit would allow them to ban the import of foie gras, which is so cruel to ducklings and geese. Vanished, all because the Prime Minister is too chicken to do anything about it. [HON. MEMBERS: “Groan!”] Only warm words, but no concrete proposals on trophy hunting. All our constituents write in in their hundreds about these things—but the proposals are gone. Two years on since the promise of an employment Bill—that sounded really good, didn't it?—employment rights, flexible working and carers' leave have also disappeared from the Queen's Speech, despite the P&O scandal. BO seems, concerningly, a handy cover to euphemistically deregulate and scrap protections in a race to the bottom Singapore-on-Thames, which we know at least half the Cabinet salivates for.

We now know that the plan is to leave the European Court of Human Rights, and repeal and dilute EU law bypassing Parliament. It is all very fitting for a Government with an aversion to being held to account—wasted time and populist headline chasing when we could be addressing the real crises of a country feeling the pinch. The *Financial Times* said it is

“red meat over real reform”,

[Dr Rupa Huq]

a bunch of ill-considered, ill-timed, unnecessary and nakedly political measures: flogging off that great Thatcher legacy, Channel 4; waging a trade war with the EU; joining Russia—only Russia has done this before—in quitting the ECHR; and regulating street naming. I have knocked on loads of doors over the years every day in the run-up to elections, and no normal person on the doorstep wants any of that. Yet there is nothing to tackle the climate crisis, or to cut energy bills, or to make people more secure at work, or to turn around our struggling economy—none of the stuff that people desperately need.

The rollercoaster nature of the Government is that they are prone to knee-jerkism and tearing up their own manifesto commitments rather than thinking through problems. On this occasion, this ostensible blizzard of Bills is ultimately a too-little-too-late Queen's Speech without a Queen. I was pleased to see that Her Majesty was on Crossrail yesterday and has been enjoying the horses recently. HRH has been an able stand-in, but maybe we can all agree that Her Majesty will deliver many more addresses from the throne, starting, as soon as possible, with one from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Leader of the Opposition, when we re-take the reins. Bring it on!

3.44 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and I rise to give general support to the Queen's Speech. There are areas about which I am particularly enthusiastic, and there are one or two areas where I have to sound a note of warning for my Whips.

I thought that the tone adopted by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was rather surprisingly wide of the mark. Their remarks were perhaps a little ungracious about the Gracious Speech. The hon. Gentleman said that the Queen's Speech lacks content and does not really have a theme. I have here the explanatory notes for the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, given that we are talking about substance. He complained that there were Bills that would be no more than clauses in other Bills, but this Bill has 11 parts, all of which could be very substantial Bills in other cases. It recognises that the reputation of this Administration will very much depend on whether, by the next election, we have put in place the path to delivering levelling up and regeneration in practice, and that those parts of the country that lent us their vote in 2019 will convert that to a rather more permanent arrangement when they see this Administration beginning to deliver in a way that they have not seen for decades. This Bill provides a most important centre of the legislative programme and, by and large, it will have my full support.

There are specific opportunities in the Queen's Speech. For example, the genetic technology Bill, which has been championed by our absolutely marvellous science Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman)—will open up potential opportunities for growth in our economy

and investment in science and research. The United Kingdom should take the opportunities to establish global leadership in this space.

I am a veteran, and although I did not serve in the Province in my time in the armed forces, I think that the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill is the product of long consultation and wise reflection to try to find the right balance to deal with the difficult issues involved.

The Social Security (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill is to be welcomed. It recognises the long periods in which people now have to live with the prospect of knowing that their lives are coming to an end, and will extend benefits from six months to 12.

In general, I welcome the Public Order Bill, which will hold to account people who are intent on disrupting society. As for its content, however, I feel that we might have slightly missed an opportunity in imposing criminal sanctions on those people. Why not civil sanctions? If they are determined to go to the greatest trouble for the greatest number, and to impose costs on our public services and costs on people whose activities are disrupted in an unfair way—as regards the cause that protesters are trying to promote—I think that we should have explored civil sanctions rather more carefully. If people with resources are going to stick themselves to the road or tie themselves to the top of underground trains, so that the travel arrangements of others are disrupted, there is a specific opportunity to provide restoration to those who have been inconvenienced by them. As a great supporter of restorative justice, I think that we should try to widen the spread of that in the justice system, so that we hold people accountable for their actions against and damage to others.

Obviously I welcome the inclusion in the Gracious Speech of the conversion therapy ban Bill. It is still being drafted and has not yet been presented to the House, but we hope to see it before we rise for the summer recess. I say gently to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that it may be easy to make a quip and laugh at the Leader of the Opposition's expense about what a woman looks like, but perhaps he does not need to look very much further than Bridgend to see that the question can be just a little more complicated than a first glance might suggest. I therefore think that gender identity should be included within the scope of the conversion therapy ban Bill. I will certainly lend my support to colleagues on both sides of the House to work in the direction of ensuring that we have a proper conversion therapy ban that protects people in respect both of sexuality and of gender identity.

I understand the purpose of the boycott Bill, which is described as legislation to

“prevent public bodies engaging in boycotts that undermine community cohesion.”

However, I think we need to be a little careful. I am afraid that in the last Session I supported an amendment on the subject tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick); that was an error of judgment on my part, because I was not paying sufficient attention to the business, and I do not intend to repeat that mistake if the boycott measure comes back to the House. It is designed to take away people's ability to make a statement of their beliefs about the policy of a nation that is in gross breach of international law. Obviously the nation in question is Israel, and obviously

the community cohesion being thought about relates to antisemitism within communities. I fully appreciate the Government's concerns about the matter, but if a nation is in gross breach of the fourth Geneva convention, has invaded and then settled an occupied territory, and is killing journalists in that territory who are observing what is going on, we might just want to reflect on what capacity or ability there is in our society to say, "We don't think that's right," notwithstanding the obvious associated issues of antisemitism.

Finally, on the Northern Ireland protocol Bill, the statement that we make in the Gracious Speech about our values as a society—the values of Britain post Brexit—is incredibly important. We need to be a nation that stands up for the rule of law and the rules-based international system to sustain our security and our role in the world. The enormous reputation of the City of London and of the commercial part of our justice system, in which companies from countries around the world come to have their disputes adjudicated under British law in British courts, is a huge credit to our country and our system. British law, in general, is trusted. I do not think that we should play quite so fast and loose with powers to overturn the protocol until we have explored every other conceivable option, including holding the European Union responsible for the consequences of an overly legalistic approach, which I think would be a better route.

3.53 pm

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): In the recent local elections, the Conservatives lost almost 500 council seats across Britain as the public delivered their verdict on the Conservative Government's performance at Westminster. Voters expressed their dismay at the Chancellor's refusal to get a grip on rising inflation or offer families support through the cost of living crisis. This Gracious Speech provided the Conservatives with an opportunity to reset by introducing legislation to meet three major challenges: tackling rising household bills, starting to grow our economy again and building into our economy the all-important resilience that we require at a time when hostile foreign states such as Russia and China are on the rise.

The Conservative Government have offered none of those things, so the entire Gracious Speech has fallen utterly and spectacularly flat. Despite the Government's promise in the opening sentence to "help ease the cost of living for families",

there was nothing of the sort to be found in the speech. With household energy bills rising by £700 a year and inflation outstripping wages, we needed a Government who were ready to tackle this crisis head-on. Instead, the Conservatives are raising taxes on working people, and in this they are an outlier: no other Government are responding to the cost of living crisis by hammering working people with more taxes.

The Labour party has a clear plan. First, we would scrap the national insurance rise. Then we would reduce energy bills by as much as £600 per household per year, expand the warm home discount, and support the businesses that are hardest hit. That would be paid for by a windfall tax on the spiralling profits of oil and gas giants which, by the admission of BP bosses themselves, have "more cash than we know what to do with" and are effectively "a cash machine".

However, we would also look to the long term. As well as taking those immediate crisis management measures, we would fix the foundations of Britain's economic model. Despite the Government's latest attempts to shift the blame, it is clear that the roots of this cost of living crisis are not global but national. The reality is that the Chancellor is presiding over a high-tax economy, and that is because, for more than a decade, the Conservatives have presided over a low-growth economy, based on insecure work and chronic underinvestment, driving a productivity crisis. Indeed, Britain has a 20% productivity gap with other leading nations. There has been chronic underinvestment by consecutive Conservative Governments in research and development, but the impact of that has been a real shortfall in investment by the private sector in the UK, compared with Europe. Figures from the OECD show that Britain's private sector investment as a share of GDP is the lowest among the 36 members assessed.

At the heart of the decline in productivity has been the decline in our manufacturing sector. Since 2015 alone, the Government have lost more than 230,000 manufacturing jobs. The result has been an increasingly unbalanced economy, in favour of London and the south-east, and proof that the Conservatives are not levelling up, but levelling down. Communities across Britain's proud industrial heartlands in the midlands, northern England and South Wales—home of my Aberavon constituency and our Port Talbot steelworks, of which we are immensely proud—are struggling to get a look in.

What we need is a modern manufacturing renaissance. It is far easier to drive productivity gains in the manufacturing sector than to do so in services, but this is not manufacturing based on the old industries of the past; it is modern, it is green, and it is in the high-tech industries of the future. Those are the industries that deliver the good, meaningful, productive, well-paid jobs on which people can raise a family on, and they are the jobs that will get our economy firing on all cylinders, throughout the UK. We need to get Britain making and exporting at levels that reflect our true potential.

That is why the shadow Chancellor's "make, buy and sell more in Britain" policy is so important. A Labour Government would change procurement laws so that the British Government must buy British by default. A Labour Government would introduce a green steel deal, creating a world-leading steel industry to power us through the century ahead. A Labour Government would back 100,000 businesses with start-up loans to boost British small and medium-sized enterprises. Labour's plan is to build a better post-covid economy, to drive growth and truly get our economy firing on all cylinders, with good jobs at its heart.

Let us contrast our approach to work and good jobs on which people can raise a family with the Conservatives' axing of the long-promised employment Bill, which was expected to outlaw the type of dreadful business practice that we saw when 800 P&O Ferries workers were sacked and replaced by foreign workers paid less than the minimum wage. Labour would outlaw that practice immediately, across the board.

A modern manufacturing renaissance will not only help to boost growth and help us to build a vibrant, modern economy for the future; it will also help us to



[Stephen Kinnock]

build that resilient economy for the future—a Britain that can stand more firmly on its own two feet. By backing British manufacturing, we can reduce supply chain pressures caused by the behaviour of authoritarian states such as Russia and China, and by the covid-19 pandemic. In that regard, an energy security plan is also crucial. Frankly, it is staggering that China owns 33% of the Hinkley Point nuclear power station.

There is too little in the UK Government's new agenda that actually gets to the core, underlying issues that underpin this cost of living crisis. A wasted decade of low growth has left us with a weak and insecure economy that is ill-prepared for the challenges and turbulence of an uncertain world. Building that economy is the job of Government. Politicians are not bystanders in this. The Chancellor is not a victim. The Tories have become the party of high taxes and low pay because they are the party of low growth and insecurity. We believe that Britain deserves better. A Labour Government would help workers and families through this cost of living crisis and deliver the resilient, growing, sustainable economy that will get our country fit for the future.

4 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) attacks us for being the party of low growth, but this is the party that has presided over a situation where we have more people in employment than ever before. Unbelievably, the number of vacancies is higher than the number of those who are unemployed. But he is right—this is why I am going to follow the hon. Gentleman—to focus laser-like on what we are told to talk about today, although we are allowed to stray a bit during this Queen's Speech debate, which is achieving economic growth. That is what the British people care about. In time, we can have an interesting debate about Channel 4 privatisation, about foie gras and about conversion therapy, but those are not the overwhelming priorities of the British people at the moment. What they are concerned about is the cost of living crisis.

There has never been an easier opportunity for the Opposition to attack the Government in terms of broad economic statistics, but that ignores the fact that when the last general election took place we could not possibly have predicted the impact of a global pandemic or, unbelievably, war in Europe as a result of the cruel tyrant Putin trying to recreate an old-style empire. I would argue that no Government since the second world war have faced greater challenges. I would also contend that, generally, the Opposition have failed to provide any substantial alternative policies that would have greatly alleviated the situation in regard to the war in Ukraine or the pandemic.

I am going to hold the Government to account, however. I want to hold them to account on the tax burden. Given that families are suffering and people are lying awake at night desperately searching for a way to pay their bills, and that we are in such a crisis, we have to move in a far more radical direction on the overall tax burden. I put that to the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday in Treasury questions, and I was quite pleased with his response when I urged him to make this a priority.

We are now facing the heaviest tax burden since the 1940s. Freezing income tax thresholds, combined with more inflation, will push many people into higher tax thresholds. Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that

“almost all workers will be paying more tax on their earnings in 2025 than they would have been paying without this parliament's reforms to income tax and NICs”.

The rise in inflation is projected to spark the biggest decline in living standards in any single financial year, so I follow the hon. Member for Aberavon in calling for radical policies. I am not against a windfall tax, but I am not sure that, on its own, it will make a great deal of difference after we have divided its receipts between every household in Britain. Frankly, the Chancellor has to come back to this House in time for the Budget, or preferably before, and introduce a cut in the overall tax burden.

I also want to talk about the housing crisis. If we are going to kick-start the economy and help our young people get into housing, we simply have to build much more housing. The number of dwellings where, according to building control figures, building work had started on the site was 41,600 in October to December 2021. That was a 3% decrease compared with the previous quarter and a 3% decrease compared with the same quarter of the previous year. The number of dwellings completed from October to December 2021 was 41,330, a 4% decrease on the previous quarter and an 11% decrease on the same quarter of the previous year. The fact is that this is a crisis.

I welcome that, through the Queen's Speech, the Government are honestly attempting to find a way through the planning controls to get the housing we need, but we need a similar effort to the one we had after the second world war, when Harold Macmillan built 300,000 council houses a year. We have to see this as an absolute priority.

There is no point building more housing—and it is a crisis we need to address—or cutting taxes if, at the same time, immigration is out of control. The Government have to understand that we simply cannot replace mass immigration from the EU with mass immigration from the rest of the world, which is why the channel crossings are so totemic. The Home Secretary is right to try to address the crossings, for all the controversy.

Last week, from 9 to 15 May, 607 migrants aboard 25 boats were detected in the channel. In the week before, from 2 to 8 May, 792 migrants aboard 30 boats were detected. From 25 April to 1 May, 254 migrants aboard seven boats were detected. This cannot continue. We have to build houses, we have to control immigration, we have to cut taxes and we have to kick-start the economy.

Although there has been great criticism of the Government's handling of the Northern Ireland protocol, we have to unite this United Kingdom. We cannot have a situation in which there is no proper Government in Northern Ireland. The fact is that the DUP will not come back into government unless we address the protocol. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) that of course we want to respect international law, but we have to sort this out.

The issues we face are urgent and important. I am sure the Government are listening, and I urge them to address these issues as dramatically as they would address

the issues following a world war. The effects of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine are so grave that we should all unite, with a sense of compassion, to help people who are suffering with this level of inflation, rising costs and rising taxation.

4.7 pm

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): Unlike the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, I stand not as a conduit of God but as a heretic shaking my metaphorical fist at the crumbling edifice of economic orthodoxy.

The title of today's debate is "Achieving Economic Growth," but to what end? For more than 70 years, successive Governments preened themselves in the mirror and admired what they saw—growth. That mirror is better known as gross domestic product and it has become our key metric for judging how beautiful we are as both an economy and a society. We use it to gauge progress and as a proxy for our collective wellbeing, yet the mirror we have been staring into all these years is less of the bathroom variety and more of the fairground variety, reflecting a distorted image at odds with the reality confronting many of our constituents over those long decades.

Growth is an illusion that is partly responsible for driving three of the key challenges we now face: rising inequality, the erosion of democracy and the climate crisis. We have had GDP growth, albeit sluggish, over the past 12 years. Hence, by our main metric of choice, our collective wellbeing should have increased, even if only incrementally. That is the logic of the message we tell our constituents, "You've never had it so good because the economy is growing."

Yet, by focusing on growth, we too often evade the hard political questions about distribution. If the economic pie is growing, the proportional size of the slice matters less, but the issue still gnaws away at people's sense of fair play. Back in 2016, during a Brexit debate, a remain campaigner told his audience:

"If we leave the EU, GDP will fall."

He was, of course, as we have seen, correct, but that is not the point I wish to make. The point is the heckle from a lady in the audience, which came back:

"That's your bloody GDP. Not ours."

She knew that for millions like her the proceeds of growth were never fairly shared and that, when the economy grew, the overwhelming beneficiaries of that growth were the rich and powerful, not her. Even when it was growing but not fast enough for its main beneficiaries, it was the public services that she relied on that had to be discarded—again, in the name of economic growth.

That leads us on to the second great challenge of this century: defending democracy, not just from external threats, such as Russia, but from within. Why? Because if people do not see the reality of their lived experience reflected in the political discourse of their politicians and do not hear their reality being discussed in this place, that gulf is dangerous. Citizens end up believing they are being deceived, and nothing is more dangerous or destructive to our democracy. We must understand that our constituents' buy-in to any political economy depends not just on their absolute wealth, but, rather, on their relative wealth to those around them. As has been repeatedly demonstrated, the more unequal a society

is, the less satisfied its citizens will be. That results in political instability, higher crime rates and higher levels of mental health illness—and we wonder why demand for mental health services is going through the roof in this country.

Let us, for the sake of argument, park both democracy and inequality to the side for one moment and ask ourselves: how do we square unlimited growth on a finite planet? It is a fair question but one that never gets a remotely convincing answer. Apparently, it is through increased resource use efficiency and productivity gains. In the next half of this century, the global economy will triple the number of people who will enjoy western levels of consumption, to 3 billion. That is despite the fact that the 1 billion of us already consuming that much are using 1.6 times more of the planet's resources than is sustainable—you can do the maths. In other words, the growth delusion is a fallacy that will drive climate and ecological destruction and kill us all. Only in the warped reality of our current growth-obsessed economic model is expansion without end seen as a virtue. In biology, it is called a cancer.

Bobby Kennedy knew this truth more than 50 years ago when he made his now famous speech on the limits of GDP growth as a metric for success. He understood that GDP is mercenary, blind to morality and indifferent to suffering. GDP growth loves pollution, especially if it has to be cleared up. It relishes crime, especially if more prisons must be built. It delights in war, especially if countries require rebuilding in the aftermath. That does not mean there is no place for GDP as an economic tool but, if we are to successfully face the existential challenges of this century, we need new political tools for measuring wellbeing, the health of our democracy, and the ecological and climate cost of our economic activities.

4.13 pm

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), who addressed the topic of today's debate, "Achieving economic growth", by seeming to argue that economic growth is not only not important, but not desirable. I wonder therefore whether he will be having a word with his Front-Bench team, who seem to have spent most of the afternoon criticising the Government for not delivering sufficient economic growth, but that is a matter for him.

It is a pleasure to take part in today's debate, to address the issue in question and to raise one or two points about the Queen's Speech. Successful growth will be delivered through the effective role of the private sector. It is the private sector that is the wealth generator. I was delighted that the Chief Secretary accepted that reality in his opening remarks.

Both the economy generally and individual businesses face exceptional challenges, ones that have not been encountered for generations. Those challenges revolve around the recovery from the covid pandemic and, now, the need to address the issues arising from the conflict in Ukraine and its impact on energy prices.

I recently spent a really interesting lunch time with the Coventry and Warwickshire chamber of commerce. I expected those who attended to talk to me about supply chain problems and the challenges presented by inflation, but the biggest single issue they wanted to talk

[Mark Pawsey]

about was ensuring that they had a workforce with the right skills and the recruitment and retention of their staff. We have heard about jobs from many Members, not least my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who spoke about the “jobs miracle”. The ONS tells us that unemployment is at its lowest since 1974 and job vacancies are at a record high of 1.295 million. In fact, we have more vacancies than people looking for work. The unemployment rate is now just 3.7%, which is the lowest rate for 50 years. The figures for my constituency tell exactly the same story, with unemployment falling and vacancies rising.

However, the current situation creates real challenges for businesses. As consumers, we recognise the effect of staff shortages: short-staffed businesses do not have the time to answer the phone or respond to inquiries, and there is a decline in service levels. Significantly for both businesses and the broader economy, opportunities are missed. In previous years, UK companies were able to look to eastern Europe to fill vacancies when they had staff and skills shortages, but that has become less of an option following our departure from the European Union. Businesses have raised with me the loss from the workforce of people in the 50 to 70 age demographic who either lost or left their jobs during the pandemic. The Government should focus on how we might get such experienced people back into the workforce.

There have been a lot of references in the debate to the ONS and its reports. Just a few months ago, in March 2022, the ONS published a report on its over-50s lifestyle study, which looked at the motivation of 50 to 70-year-olds who left employment during the pandemic. The ONS found that 77% of those aged 50 to 59 had left sooner than they had expected or intended to. It found that 19% had left because of stress or mental health, but that 58% would consider returning to the workforce and 15% actively wanted to return. Were those people to return to the workforce, 36% of them would consider a flexible attitude to working to be most important, and 69% would want to work part time. It is important for the Government to consider ways to get such people back into the workforce, because they have valuable experience and can make a contribution. I saw an example of the people I am talking about in the volunteers I worked with on the delivery of the vaccine programme. Demand exists in the economy but it is not being fulfilled. We need to put the two things together.

In achieving economic growth, it is important for investors, customers, suppliers and the workforce to be able to understand the true state of a company. I note the Government’s interest in restoring trust in our audit and reporting systems through our corporate governance system. I am a member of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and we have looked at auditing, so I was disappointed to see that the audit reform Bill in the Queen’s Speech remains only in draft form. I want to see swift action to ensure that the full Bill comes to the House as promptly as possible. We know about the dominance of the big four, and we have had many reports and three independent reviews, as well as the work done by the Select Committee. I want the Government to make sure that a transparent and effective audit system is introduced. There are plenty of reports calling for change, and we have seen the events

at Carillion, Patisserie Valerie, Thomas Cook, P&O Ferries and BHS. We need to rectify the situation, and I hope that the audit reform Bill is brought forward.

It is important to equalise growth across the country, and the levelling-up provisions are incredibly important in that regard. On the planning system, I want to ensure that an adequate supply of land is made available for businesses. That is an issue in my constituency. We are at the centre of England, making ours an ideal location for the logistics businesses that want to serve the country, but land is rapidly being taken up. I am concerned that, even now, many local councils have no up-to-date local plan, and instead rely on applications coming in and development control.

I note some of the provisions on local involvement, but the current neighbourhood plans are too bureaucratic and long-winded and take too long to implement. I note, too, the attempt to give people more involvement in planning issues and the principle of street referendums, but I am uneasy about those proposals as they may become a vehicle for disputes between neighbours. The Government may also have a real challenge in defining what constitutes a street.

Housing supply is a vital part of economic growth. Building homes is an economic activity, and of course new housing provides homes for workers, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) reminded us a few moments ago. In my constituency, we have probably one of the best examples in the country of delivering new housing at volume through the development of Houlton, the sustainable urban extension to Rugby, which is being developed by Urban&Civic. That massive developer has great control over the activities of the house builders, and I believe that it is creating communities as well as building homes. It is vital that we provide the infrastructure first. In Rugby, we now have a link road to the main urban community, and both primary and secondary schools, but the challenge is to get the healthcare provision in place. There is a great deal of development in Rugby, and I am proud of what we have achieved.

I conclude by noting that there are many provisions in the Queen’s Speech that will support our businesses and enable growth and development to take place.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. I hope that we can manage without a formal time limit, but that means that I must ask colleagues to stick to about six minutes. Six minutes and 20 seconds is okay, but eight minutes is not.

4.22 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) and his broad critique of the Queen’s Speech.

Today’s inflation figures add to mounting evidence of UK stagflation. The Conservatives’ record is of 12 years of failure to create an economy that delivers wellbeing for people across the United Kingdom—let us remember that they have been responsible for the economy for 12 years. From the banking crisis to the present day, the Conservative party has sought out every opportunity to impose austerity and to bring about a hard Brexit of its own making. Those have combined to aggravate the UK’s cost of living crisis. Yes, there have been other



causes, which have been beyond our control, and possibly beyond any Government's control, but these are ideological choices that will go down in history as Tory creations. Out of ideas other than to centralise powers that they do not possess and blame what they do not know, the Conservatives sit on their hands as the economy for which they are responsible fails to work for households and businesses across the UK.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill does nothing to correct past mistakes or deliver for the future. The Welsh Government have stated that this Government's post-Brexit funding arrangement for Wales falls short by £772 million of structural funds alone for the period 2021 to 2025. That is not only

“an assault on Welsh devolution”—

not my words, but the words of Labour's Minister for Economy—but a broken election promise. More broadly, sources including Bloomberg illustrate a failure to maintain current standards, let alone deliver any improvement, across most of the UK and especially across Wales.

That is not what was promised on page 15 of the 2019 Welsh Conservatives manifesto, which said that

“no part of the UK loses out from the withdrawal of EU funding”.

It is certainly not what was promised on page 29, which said that

“Wales will not lose any powers or funding as a result of our exit from the EU.”

Three years into this Parliament and six years on from Brexit, this Government cannot articulate or deliver any clear benefits to Wales. We need an honest funding settlement, devolved engagement and a focus on delivery rather than glossy announcements.

Other elements of the Queen's Speech also give pause for thought. Rather than correcting Wales's underfunding of more than £5 billion from HS2, it gives us—wait for it—Great British Railways. Rather than working with Transport for Wales, our publicly owned transport body, it seems that Westminster's solution to historical underfunding is to override our solution while not correcting the underlying problems that need fixing. Put bluntly, this Government's approach to a difficult problem is to stick a Union Jack on it and sing a song of praise to past glories. Nostalgia does not an economy make.

Plaid Cymru drove the creation of the Development Bank of Wales, yet its future, and how the new UK infrastructure bank will work with rather than over the devolved institutions, is unclear. We do not know how what we are operating for ourselves to improve the economy of Wales will align with what is being done in Westminster. That is not good government.

**Alison Thewliss:** The right hon. Lady makes an excellent point. The Scottish National Investment Bank is already up and running, but there is nothing from the Government on how that will interact with their plans either.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** Exactly. The lack of clarity and working together does not help anybody's economy.

This Queen's Speech does nothing for the basics of the Welsh economy or to address the ongoing cost of living crisis. I reiterate Plaid Cymru's call for an emergency Budget and measures including a windfall tax, increased energy bill support and the expansion of the rural fuel duty relief scheme for Wales.

Net zero is obviously in the Queen's Speech but, alas, missed opportunities include the devolution of the Crown Estate and the establishment of a Welsh national energy company to support local renewable generation and fix grid capacity—measures, by the way, that Plaid Cymru has agreed with Labour in Wales through our co-operation agreement. It is good to see politicians working together in the common interest of all the people in all our communities, rather than in conflict. I ask the Government to address the shortage of grid capacity somehow, because without further grid capacity in many areas of Wales we cannot grow our own renewable supplies and make the best of that opportunity.

Westminster's refusal to countenance legitimate devolved proposals to boost our economy scorns our democratic voice. It emphasises how, until we have full powers over our future, we will always be treated as second best, simultaneously mocked for seeking handouts and told to be contented with handouts.

I hope the Chancellor will address the immediate crisis with an emergency Budget, or whatever he chooses to call it, including measures such as a reformed SME tax relief in Wales to boost productivity as a first step. I also hope the UK Government's vaunted Great British Nuclear will work with and learn from Wales's existing Cwmni Egino, which is already at work to develop the nuclear licensed site of Trawsfynydd.

Where there is a problem, it seems the UK Government's answer is to cobble together a UK-branded institution to wallpaper over the self-perpetuating vortex effect of research funding, public investment and targeted tax relief that keeps the south-east of England within the pale of economic privilege and the rest of England's regions, Northern Ireland and the nations of Scotland and Wales, as always, beyond it.

4.29 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I will focus my remarks on the work of SMEs in driving economic growth. As we often say in this place, they, more than anything else, are the engine room of economic growth.

Taking a step back from that, the most important thing in driving economic growth—the foundation of which is productivity, which leads to prosperity—is more competition. Competition is very good for opportunity but also very good for consumers: it drives down prices and drives up service. When we started our estate agent business back in 1992, we quickly got to a leading market share in our marketplace. We were doing quite well. Two or three years later, we noticed lots of other “For Sale” and “To Let” boards popping up all over the place as new competition came in and was taking market share from us. Suddenly we were no longer the new kids on the block—the people who had got to No. 1. We had been pushed off our perch as the market leader. That made us look at what we were doing and become more efficient and more effective, work harder, and put a new package together so that we could once again become market leaders. That is the effect of competition—the driving force behind all the benefits for consumers that we see from competition. That is how it works in reality.

**Clive Lewis:** What competition drives the energy, water and rail sectors? They seem to be natural monopolies, if I am not mistaken, so can the hon. Gentleman tell me how the free market and competition help to drive down prices in those sectors?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** That is quite interesting, because energy distribution was very competitive in this country, with a huge expansion in the number of energy distributors that led to a driving down of prices very effectively. Where people got caught out was with the huge increase in wholesale costs, which drove lots of them out of business. However, that was an excellent example of how competition does work and drives down prices for consumers and increases choice. As to source energy, I agree that there are not enough big producers, which is why we must be careful when one or two big companies dominate the marketplace.

G.K. Chesterton said:

“Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists.”

That is why we need to focus on competition, making sure that the environment is very attractive to new businesses starting up and growing—SMEs. All our policies should focus on small businesses, not on big businesses, which can generally look after themselves.

We have to look at the brutal facts, I am afraid. I was a bit disappointed, as I said earlier, by what the Governor of the Bank of England said to the Treasury Committee about some of the issues we are seeing with labour shortages, which are driving inflation. We looked at some of the issues that SMEs, in particular, are facing in terms of accessing labour. In 2020, the last year we have reliable data for, net migration into the UK dropped by 88% from 271,000 people down to 34,000 people. People may say that is a good thing because we wanted to get a hold of immigration, and some of it may be due to covid effects. Nevertheless, pubs, restaurants and farmers, all of whom are generally SMEs, are finding life very difficult. We have to make sure that there is an available supply of labour. Another issue causing particular problems for SMEs is red tape at the borders—non-tariff barriers, as they might be called. There is a 45% reduction in the number of SMEs exporting to the European Union. These are facts we have to confront and deal with.

Levelling up is of particular interest to me as a representative of the north—from the north and for the north. We need to make sure that we level up properly and that the opportunities are spread equally nationwide. It is a huge undertaking. In relative terms, the gap between the north-east and London and the south-east in terms of productivity per capita is as wide as it was between East Germany and West Germany prior to reunification. It took 30 years and \$2 trillion to narrow that gap. It is the right thing to do but it is a long haul. We need to get the private sector to invest, which was the lesson from East Germany. Such things as the enterprise investment scheme and the seed enterprise investment scheme are vital for equity investment to SMEs. Those measures are due to expire in 2025, and we need to see them extended. I would also like to see enhanced tax breaks for the EIS and SEIS so that businesses in the less well-off parts of the country can attract more investment capital into those areas.

Finally, one thing could make a massive difference. Lots of SMEs in this country will not borrow—some 73% would rather grow more slowly than borrow—which is partly because of the lack of trust between small businesses and big banks. Other parts of the world have something called regional mutual banks—Germany is a good example—that expanded lending during the financial crisis. In the UK, we contracted lending during the financial crisis—about 20% on either side. Regional mutual banks lend more into the economy at key times, and that could be a good policy for driving SMEs forward in our regions.

4.35 pm

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). This marks my fifth Queen's Speech in this House. In that relatively short time, we have had two Prime Ministers, Brexit, a global pandemic and now a brutal cost of living crisis, yet one fact has remarkably stayed the same: this Government's inability to rise to the challenge. They have not risen to the challenges faced by ordinary Brits, and sadly this Government-drafted Queen's Speech follows the same disappointing pattern and fails to grasp the severity of the situation faced by millions of people across our country.

At every turn, the absence of any real help is an insult to hard-working people. The experts are clear: more than 1.5 million British households will soon face bills for food and energy that will exceed their disposable income after housing costs. Inflation is now at its highest level for 40 years at 9% and is set to soar very soon to more than 10%. Alarming, growth is forecast by the Bank of England to be negative next year.

Beyond these statistics are people. Many Members have already eloquently highlighted the real-life struggles their constituents face, and sadly Slough is no different. I have had constituents tell me that they have been forced to cut down to one meal a day or wear extra layers of clothes in their own homes. What is stopping Ministers from acting, for example with a one-off windfall tax on energy companies? Instead of taxing big energy companies posting extra profits in the billions, the Chancellor is more intent on taxing ordinary people, who are now afflicted with the highest tax burden since the 1960s.

Even when people are in work, they cannot expect to be offered adequate protection. The Queen's Speech was 874 words, yet there was not one mention of workers' rights. There was no employment Bill, as promised in the Conservatives' election manifesto. We live in a time when workers' rights are more important than ever, with insecure work, inadequate wages and unscrupulous tactics from employers, but instead of taking action, Government Ministers go about telling workers to work more or to get another job and do not offer a decent pay rise. It is absolutely absurd.

Where the Government have decided to legislate, they have completely missed the mark. Their priorities are all wrong. On crime in particular, we have had four Queen's Speeches and three manifestos, yet the victims Bill still exists only in draft. That is of little use to the thousands of victims of crime unable to benefit. Crime is up and prosecutions are down to record lows. The number of arrests has dropped by 35,000, but victims and communities

such as mine are still suffering. This Government have made huge cuts to Slough's local youth services funding, made a real-terms cut to school budgets and cut community safety funding by 40% by 2024, even though our crime rate is 28% higher than the rest of the south-east and 27% above the national average. This Queen's Speech offers nothing to address all that.

On housing, despite almost 1 million more people now living in private rented accommodation, it has taken this long for us to see the renters reform Bill. Although there is slow progress in some areas, there is no word on the promised 300,000 homes to be built every year by the mid-2020s, a lack of detail on the decent homes standard, and no mention of the lifetime deposit. Frustratingly, five years on from the deadly Grenfell tragedy, far too many of my Slough constituents remain trapped in flats with unsafe cladding and fire safety defects, with no end in sight.

This Queen's Speech simply fails to address the problems that ordinary people up and down our country face, because Government Members do not fully understand the everyday realities of hard-working people. Where is the ambition to decarbonise our economy and our public transport system, to insulate our homes and to accelerate the transition to renewables? Where are the annual rolling programme of rail electrification, annual targets for more rail freight, and huge investment in green industry jobs? What are a Government for if not to protect people?

Privatising Channel 4 over helping families with household bills, street referendums for extensions over investing in youth services, arguing over what human rights to scrap instead of delivering a properly funded state pension—this Queen's Speech was written by a Government who are out of touch and out of ideas. I implore Ministers to see what is so plainly happening around them and to do something to help the millions of struggling Brits. If they will not address the serious issues facing our country, they should step aside for those of us who will.

4.41 pm

**Kate Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate on the Gracious Speech in the year of Her Majesty's platinum jubilee. I welcome the focus on strengthening the economy and achieving economic growth that this Queen's Speech provides after the huge impact of the covid pandemic on all sectors of the economy.

Levelling up local infrastructure is key to securing economic growth, and I welcome the steps the Government are taking to invest in our nation's infrastructure and transport links. Burton and Uttoxeter sit within the manufacturing heart of the country, and the A50-A500 corridor is home to both national and global brands, including JCB, Toyota, Nestlé, Rolls-Royce and many more. They rely on that vital link for connecting to international markets and trade around the globe. To support economic growth, new jobs and better connectivity for business and for my constituents, vital improvements are needed to this corridor.

Recently, Midlands Connect published its "The Road to Success" report, outlining suggested developments to the corridor that would create over 12,000 jobs and

generate £12 billion for the economy. With the improvements, commuters driving on the central section of this corridor, where the junction at Uttoxeter has been identified as a priority element of the strategy, would be likely to get back 3.5 working days a year by 2050. As the project champion for the improvements to the A50-A500 north midlands manufacturing corridor, I look forward to continuing to champion the project with Ministers, and making the case for the economic growth that these improvements will bring to my constituency and the wider economy.

As well as improving infrastructure, it is vital that we continue to level up our towns, so I welcome the Government's continued commitment to this important strategy. I was delighted that Burton was awarded £23.8 million from the towns fund to deliver transformative regeneration for the town. This includes reconnecting the town centre to the River Trent, making it an attractive location to visit, live and do business. I am also pleased that we have the chance to submit a bid for the second round of the levelling-up fund, complementing the town deal investment and completing the transformation of the High Street for generations to come. I look forward to the outcome of the local consultation and discussions about how we can continue to level up Burton and Uttoxeter, and I hope that as a priority 1 area the town's bid will be received favourably as it seeks to deliver on that vision of levelling up.

Of course, one of the key industries in Burton and Uttoxeter is the brewing sector, and I was pleased to welcome Staffordshire-based businesses to Parliament recently, ahead of Staffordshire Day, to promote fantastic local businesses and producers. They included Molson Coors, which recently invested £25 million in its Burton site, which is a sign of its commitment to continued innovation in the great brewing town of Burton. Breweries and the wider hospitality sector have been hit very hard by the impact of the pandemic and the current rise in the cost of living. During the pandemic, the Chancellor reduced VAT on hospitality goods and services, which was of huge benefit to businesses in my constituency. However, disruption to these businesses is still being felt, and I would take this opportunity to urge the Government to reconsider the proposal of the Long Live the Local campaign for a permanent hospitality VAT rate of 12.5%. That could generate an additional turnover of £7.7 billion and an additional 286,850 jobs over 10 years.

I welcome this Queen's Speech and the Government's ongoing commitment to levelling up and supporting economic growth, and I look forward to continuing to support opportunities for investment across Burton and Uttoxeter, such as the vital improvements to the A50-A500 corridor, that my constituents elected me to deliver.

4.45 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): I was very disappointed by the Gracious Speech as it failed to deal with a number of things that really matter to my constituents and, I believe, to the country at large. First and foremost, and we have heard this mentioned many times today, the cost of living crisis is clear: inflation is nearing 10%, economic growth has been revised down, we have the slowest recovery in the G7, interest rates are up and real wages have fallen below 2008 levels. The impact of that on my constituents and people across the



[Yasmin Qureshi]

country is huge. They are having to choose between heating and eating. That phrase has been used quite a lot today, but these choices are real, not imagined, as some Conservative Members like to suggest.

The Government are refusing to help those people. Why? I am not trying to be controversial, but perhaps, fundamentally, it is because certain people in the Government do not care and hold ordinary people in contempt. Why do I say that, and where did this rot start? In 1995, the current Prime Minister penned an article in *The Spectator* claiming that working-class men are “likely to be drunk, criminal, aimless, feckless and hopeless”.

Did he stop there? No, he said that the children of single mothers are

“ill-raised, ignorant, aggressive and illegitimate”.

It is a bit like the pot calling the kettle black.

One may ask whether perhaps the Prime Minister is just one bad apple—wrong! The current Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Business, the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary co-authored a pamphlet in 2011 that claimed

“the British are among the worst idlers in the world.”

I would like them to come to Bolton South East and tell that to the care assistants, the cleaners and the retail workers, who are often working more than 50 hours a week on the minimum wage just to make ends meet, and see their reaction and what they have to say.

On the morning round a few days ago, a Home Office Minister said that people can move to “a better-paid job” or “take on more hours” to address the crisis. In my constituency, there are not many better-paid jobs and everyone is already working more than they need to do. Then we had the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) claiming that people can cook meals for 30p and implying that poverty was a choice. Well, as somebody who cooks quite regularly, I can tell him that we cannot get a meal for 30p, even when we are cooking at home. Many people in my constituency of Bolton South East have written to me feeling very insulted and saying that they cannot actually afford to use their oven because of energy costs. I say that, frankly, it is insulting to my constituents.

There is, however, another option—a real plan to fix the cost of living crisis. In the first three months of this year, Shell made £5 billion in profit and BP £7 billion. Those profits have been made through the charges paid by us, the consumers. The Labour party has constantly pushed for a windfall tax on oil and gas companies—calls that have so far fallen on deaf ears—to fund a real support package for working families, rather than the £150, which is a loan that people will have to repay. We have also suggested that VAT on energy bills should be removed for the lowest paid and that the universal credit allowance should be increased. I know that the Government think the universal credit allowance is somehow a benefit for those not working, but many of those receiving it are working, yet their pay is so low that they still need to rely on state benefits. The £20 a week reduction in the universal credit allowance has affected £14,000 of my constituents—people for whom this is very important benefit. We have also asked for the warm home discount to be expanded, which would also help by keeping energy bills down.

**Matt Rodda:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent and heartfelt speech, which I am sure the whole House is listening to intently. Does she agree that part of the problem is that many of our poorest constituents live in some of the worst-insulated houses and that we urgently need to tackle this problem?

**Yasmin Qureshi:** That is absolutely right, and their situation is exacerbated by that. Often they also have damp in their homes, which has not been sorted out. Yet the Government refuse to act and say there is no money, but we know that they wasted £39 billion on track and trace, when the same system in France cost only about £3 billion to roll out. So the money is there if there is the will to use it.

There was also nothing in the Budget to deliver better infrastructure, trams and trains in my constituency. There was nothing about building more social housing and affordable housing, in particular by using brownfield sites to meet housing shortages. The Government say they are interested in renewables and tackling climate change, yet real investment—which the Labour party has also argued for—could create good jobs and eventually reduce our dependence on energy supplies from other countries, as the Ukraine war has shown the need for.

This was a missed opportunity to deal with many issues, including first and foremost the cost of living crisis. The Government have refused to do that. As far as I am concerned, they really do not care about my constituents.

4.52 pm

**Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con):** I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), but I am sorry that she, like others, has chosen to misrepresent my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson). I suggest that she goes and listens to what he actually said.

I am pleased to be able to speak in support of the Queen’s Speech on our final day of debate, when we have the opportunity to discuss achieving economic growth. I spent my entire career in manufacturing businesses before becoming an MP in 2019, and I firmly believe in the power of economic growth and investment to change towns and the lives of people in them. In order to do so, it is important to encourage both the physical and human assets that are necessary to sustain an economic ecosystem.

It is also critical that the Government support our people through the cost of living challenges. I am confident that our Chancellor will deliver on that in cohesion with his Cabinet colleagues. I note that earlier in the debate the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) indicated that 33% of people would benefit from Labour’s windfall tax proposal to the tune of £600, yet the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) has apparently said that the rest would also get £200. So while they indicate that there would be £3 billion in tax receipts, they propose to spend £8 billion. They either disagree with each other or it is classic Labour maths and misrepresentation.

**Yasmin Qureshi:** In my opinion we are facing a cost of living crisis. I do not care whether it costs £3 billion or £8 billion; the Government need to bring out the money to look after those people.

**Paul Howell:** Of course the Government need to look after those people, and the Chancellor will do that cohesively with the rest of the Cabinet, but we must focus on the importance of resilience, particularly for our national assets. The past two years have demonstrated the fragility of supply chains and the risk of geopolitical instability affecting consumers in the UK. We need to increase the use of some of our new-found Brexit freedoms to ensure that nationally strategic assets are kept in British hands.

Economic growth and levelling up go hand in hand. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for “left behind” neighbourhoods, I am convinced that we cannot have the latter without the former. That is why, when making spending decisions, the Treasury should emphasise creating new business clusters in left-behind areas. For that to happen, we need a skilled workforce in the area. That is why I think that, of all the Bills in the Queen’s Speech, the one that will have the greatest economic impact on areas with historically lower levels of economic growth will be not any of the legislation sponsored by BEIS or the Treasury but the higher education Bill.

The north-east is already on the right track. My constituency is fortunate enough to be surrounded by five universities, all of which do excellent work. To the north of Sedgefield, Northumbria University has done particularly well recently, leaping from No. 50 to No. 23 in the latest research excellence framework ranking. Together with Durham University, it is well on the way to creating a northern research powerhouse, which is further enhanced by the complementary provisions of Newcastle, Sunderland and Teesside universities. The Bill seeks to improve standards in education generally, and the aspect that I am most excited about is the lifelong loan entitlement, guaranteeing four years of post-18 study, which will allow more career flexibility for those who have not undertaken any further or higher education. It will ensure that they have the chance to get an education to work in skilled industries. We also need to enhance the broader opportunities for people through supporting T-levels and engaging more university technical colleges such as UTC South Durham in Newton Aycliffe as well as ensuring that opportunities exist for those who have had further education in the past but now want to redirect their talents.

One of my primary focuses for delivery is speaking up for the businesses in Sedgefield, whether they are the extraordinary science-led businesses in NETPark, substantial employers such as Gestamp, Hitachi, Crafter’s Companion and 3M in Newton Aycliffe or the myriad smaller enterprises in the Aycliffe industrial estate and spread around in places such as Trimdon, Chilton, Fishburn, Wingate, Wheatley Hill, Thornley and Ferryhill. They all matter, and they all need encouragement. On Friday, I will be talking at the “make your mark” awards at Aycliffe business park, meeting businesses that I have seen before such as Husqvarna, Stillers, Ebac, Roman and Gestamp as well as the newcomers, the apprentices, the innovators and the environmentalists. We have such variety and diversity, and we need to encourage each and every one of them. They need to know that the Government’s strategy supports them, and delivering infrastructure such as bringing the train station back to Ferryhill and tax breaks for capital investment are all part of the mix.

Clusters rarely develop organically; they are usually the result of a strategy that co-ordinates investment in an area. Those strategies must consider the appropriateness of sectoral support as well. For example, as part of our drive to reach net zero by 2050, the Government are rightly keen to support investment in electric vehicles. An EV strategy, for example, must therefore support new businesses looking to work on EVs and help existing companies to adapt their current output to them. While I will always support further inward investment, considering how much expertise and jobs the established companies tend to have, the Government would do well to focus their primary efforts there.

Another part of the strategy is led by the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), with his focus on science and innovation. I encourage him in his support of the north-east space hub as part of a co-ordinated national approach to space. I direct him in particular to the asset base that we have in Sedgefield when he considers promoting the semiconductor industry. We have everything from II-VI, which is a major manufacturer, through to Evince, Filtronic, Kromek, INEX, Isocom, Northern Space and Security and PragmatIC in our interrelated clusters in the areas of advanced material electronics, resilient communications and space. The development of clusters to support UK resilience founded on existing platforms of enterprise can be transformational in levelling up places such as Sedgefield.

While the Minister has been to NETPark, he and his colleagues would be very welcome to visit more of this extraordinary supply chain. That would also enable them to see the fabulous cultural offers demonstrated in the outstanding County Durham bid for city of culture and the proposed levelling-up bid that would enhance the living environment for so many in Newton Aycliffe. I encourage our pragmatic Chancellor and innovative Prime Minister to deliver on those Bills and to remember Keynes, who said:

“What do you do when the facts change? I change my mind.”

We are in an ever-changing world, and we need to remain as flexible as possible.

4.59 pm

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): For a party that prides itself on the economy, the Tories have a shocking record of running it. Our economy has the slowest growth in the G7. We have greater regional inequality than almost any other developed nation. Food banks now do the job of Government in providing for families—families that are more often than not in work.

The Government could start solving this crisis by providing solutions, such as closing tax-avoidance loopholes or creating a windfall tax for energy companies. Instead, we get endless Bills paying lip service to a manufactured culture war. The priority is not the economy. It seems to be things like protecting freedom of speech, yet the Tories are the ones who banned schools in England from using sources that are not overtly pro-capitalist. They are cracking down on freedom of assembly and protest. They are privatising Channel 4, when the Culture Secretary did not even know that Channel 4 receives no public money, so the argument is not financial. When we consider, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) touched on earlier, that the Culture Secretary was once

[*Mhairi Black*]

a key focus of a Channel 4 documentary about the influence that Christian fundamentalism has on UK politics, it becomes even more concerning that this decision is political and personal. It is not professional.

Most terrifying of all, however, is that the Government literally want to get rid of the Human Rights Act. That begs the question: for whom do they think rights have gone too far? Do they know how scary it is to sit at home and wonder if it is you—is it your rights that are up for grabs? We have witnessed Windrush. Our economic strategy is to open our doors to the rest of the world when we need their hard work and then chuck them out 50 years later without a word's notice. We tell our own citizens that their safety cannot be guaranteed in Rwanda, but we are perfectly happy to ship asylum seekers, people fleeing war and persecution, over to Rwanda as though they are cattle to be dealt with by someone else and despite knowing that the plan costs more than it will ever save.

This is just little England elites drunk on the memory of a British empire that no longer exists. We have the lowest pensions in Europe and the lowest sick pay. We pretend the minimum wage is a living wage when it is not. We miss our own economic targets time and again. We are happy to break international law. We are turning into a country where words hold no value.

Over the last 12 years, I fear we have been sleepwalking closer and closer to the F word. I know everyone is scared to say it for fear of sounding over the top or being accused of going too far, but I say this with all sincerity. When I say the F word, I am talking about fascism—fascism wrapped in red, white and blue. You may mock and you may disagree, but fascism does not come in with intentional evil plans or the introduction of leather jackboots. It does not happen like that. It happens subtly. It happens when we see Governments making decisions based on self-preservation, based on cronyism, based on anything that will keep them in power, when we see the concentration of power while avoiding any of the scrutiny or responsibility that comes with that power. It arrives under the guise of respectability and pride, which will then be refused to anyone who is deemed different. It arrives through the othering of people and the normalisation of human cruelty. I do not know how far down that road we are. Time will tell, but the things we do in the name of economic growth—the warning signs are there for everyone else to see, whether they admit it or not.

5.4 pm

**Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to support the legislative agenda that the Government set out in the Queen's Speech. When Harold Macmillan was asked what the greatest challenge facing a statesman was, he famously responded, "Events, dear boy, events". During my entire time in this place, we have been buffeted by extraordinary, frightening events, not least for our constituents up and down the country, including in my constituency. There has been fear of the health consequences of the global pandemic, as well as its economic consequences on lives and livelihoods, and the pandemic is still having an impact across the globe, notably in China. The effect on supply chains of the covid resurgence in China, including in Shanghai, is also having a devastating economic impact.

We have had to face Russia's evil and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. Not only have we rightly imposed sanctions, which the whole House supports, but the invasion itself has had an economic impact. The Governor of the Bank of England warned this week at the Treasury Committee of the "apocalyptic" prospects for food prices. He also said clearly that 80% of the causes of inflation was due to global factors. That makes Government intervention very difficult. This is a very challenging time and the cost of living crisis is very challenging for any Government who face it. They are being buffeted by global events.

After listening to some very fine and impassioned speeches from Opposition Members, I cannot help but remember that, if things had gone differently, and if they had had their way, the leader talking to our NATO allies and shepherding this country through these economic and security crises would have been the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and we would have had a Chancellor who brandished the little red book in this Chamber. So thank goodness—I believe this very strongly—that it is a Conservative Government who have been shepherding this economy and country through unprecedented, back-to-back crises over the past few years and who will continue to do so.

This Government, in shepherding and controlling the economy, have enabled us to support lives and livelihoods for the past few years to the tune of £400 billion. They continue to support people in need with a package currently of £22 billion for measures that include reducing fuel duty, raising national insurance thresholds, increasing the national living wage and others.

The heroes of the pandemic were our doctors, nurses and key workers. The future heroes in this global crisis will be the business owners, the workers in businesses and those who are innovating and starting new businesses. As I see it—I have said this before in the Chamber—that is where the Government's role is that of a groundsman. It is about setting the pitch and conditions for our bowlers and batsmen to be able to respond to the difficult balls and to knock the easy balls out of the park. I see the context of this Queen's Speech as one where, as the groundsman, we put in place those conditions, so that our players can play the best game available.

As the Chief Secretary set out, that means dealing with skills, innovation and infrastructure. All those measures are included in the Queen's Speech: the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill; the Brexit freedoms Bill; proposals on data reform and financial services to support our critical venture capital industry; the UK Infrastructure Bank Bill; and the higher education Bill. This is a consistent, thought-through package of legislation that will deal with the global and domestic challenges in the years ahead. I absolutely commend it to the House.

5.9 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson). Today, we listened again to the Prime Minister telling us that we had a strong economy, yet when Labour left office only 26,000 people a year were going to food banks and now there are 2.6 million—100 times as many. We heard that 500,000 more people are in work than before the covid pandemic, but according to the ONS there are 444,000 fewer people in work—the Prime Minister conveniently missed out



the self-employed. He said, “We are the low-tax party,” but taxes are now at a 50-year high and the Chancellor increased taxes by £40 billion last year. The tax share of GDP is at a level not seen since Attlee, when we were coming out of the second world war and we needed to charge such taxes.

Inflation is at a 40-year high. There is a departmental freeze on spending, so there are savage cuts across the board. *[Interruption.]* I see the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)—the Minister for Brexit opportunities and Government inefficiency—chattering away, living up to his title in the delivery of inefficiency. The truth is that inflation, ironically, is helping the Government’s revenues. They have a four-year freeze on personal allowances and tax thresholds, which means a creeping increase in tax as people sink into tax thresholds and allowances go down in real terms. They are planning a cynical attempt to drop tax before the next election in 2024 or 2025. That will be gobbled up by that inflationary clawback. People will think that they are getting a tax cut, but will lose twice the amount.

Is there an alternative? The answer, of course, is yes, and the evidence is that in the 10 years to 2008, when Labour was in power, the economy grew by 40%. We did not just give the proceeds away; we used them to double investment in the health service, double investment in education and bring millions of young people and pensioners out of poverty. We bequeathed a debt-to-GDP ratio of 45%; it is now 90%, so the share of debt has doubled. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that, if our trend of growth had continued, people would be £11,000 better off than they are today. They would be much more resilient to the global shocks that we have all seen, including Ukraine and covid.

There has been catastrophic mismanagement since 2010. It started with Osborne’s austerity, which simply did not work: it just drove down growth, because people were expecting that they might be one of the 400,000 people he said he was going to sack. We then had the stupidity of hard Brexit, when we decided that we would all be outside the single market. There is no move now for product realignment or a minimum amount of worker movement to allow lower-cost market access, which is what businesses want, so a third of businesses that have been exporting to the EU now say that they will not do it at all.

We have a low-growth, high-cuts, high-tax, wage-cutting Government—a complete failure. I appreciate that a windfall tax is not the complete answer, but let us understand what a windfall tax is. The oil companies worked on a marginal profit that was quite healthy; then, all of a sudden, Putin invaded and there was an escalation in the price and a massive profit over the cost of production that the companies did not do anything to deserve. That is Putin’s profit, and people here deserve it to help them through the hard times that we are going through because we are imposing sanctions. Sanctions, of course, take time; the IMF says that sanctions will cut the Russian economy by 8.5%, but they will not stop a Russian tank. The war needs to be won to sort the situation out, but that is another story.

We certainly need to increase productivity, but the reality is that the Chancellor’s ambition is to bring investment per child in education by 2024 up to Labour’s 2010 levels. Our young people need to be invested in now.

There is talk of everyone having to go back to the office. Indeed, the Minister—that man sitting on the Front Bench—has said, “We have all got to go back to work in the traditional way.” However, a study by the Office for National Statistics shows that there would be a considerable increase in productivity and a delay in retirements if people were allowed to work from home. In particular, women, carers and people looking after families could work flexibly. Furthermore, people being at home for one day in five would take 20% of the traffic and 80% of the congestion off the roads, so we would spend less on roads and it would be carbon-friendly.

This whole approach to productivity, green investment, and cognisance of those matters, is completely ridiculous. Macron, along with Italy and Germany, has asked why we cannot take a more collaborative approach to trade with Britain—and, indeed, bring in Ukraine, because it shares the same values. All we are doing is starting a trade war on the back of the very sensible arrangement that Ireland should be in the single market to protect it. That is what the Government agreed and that is what should continue to operate.

Apart from the economic catastrophe, to which there is a clear solution, I fear that there are attacks on the fundamental rights of democracy. The Queen’s Speech contains all this stuff about reducing the power of an independent judiciary. Obviously the Government are very angry with Miller because the judiciary in that case gave us a vote on the Brexit deal, and they are very angry with the judiciary for allowing democracy to be reconvened after the Prime Minister had tried to abandon it for a long period. The composition of the Supreme Court has been changed and seven of its key decisions have been reversed. It has been intimidated by the media, and by Ministers sitting there slagging it off—particularly, the Lord Chancellor who is supposed to defend it. The average tenure of a Lord Chancellor is now one and a half years; it used to be four years. The Lord Chancellor used to be a senior judge, or a member of the judiciary who was respected, rather than someone who just wants to proceed to the next ministerial position. Our independent judiciary is under attack, our rights are under attack, and our democracy is under attack.

I respect what the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) said about the rolling authoritarianism that we see in the contexts of poverty, the economy, and the democracy that we fundamentally are. We are better than this. We deserve better than this. We do not want low growth, large cuts and low wages; we want high growth, and a fairer and stronger economy in the future. Let us roll forward and deliver that—with a Labour Government.

5.17 pm

**Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): In respect of what the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) said about democracy, one would think that in the current circumstances we would be incredibly careful. We cherish our democracy in this country. Our institutions are strong. Democracy, freedom and the rule of law run through the core of this country, and hearing him observe so flippantly that democracy is under attack, or, earlier, hearing the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) suggest that we are descending into something close to fascism—only seconds after saying that words matter—is extremely frustrating.

**Mhairi Black:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mark Fletcher:** I am afraid the hon. Lady did not give way to me, so I am going to return the favour.

The Queen's Speech set out some of the things that we have needed to do for a long time for the purpose of economic growth. I am thinking particularly of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, which offers several solutions for Bolsover, Derbyshire, and the east midlands in general. That part of the country has struggled since its former industry, coalmining, has diminished. What we have needed for a long time is a new economic settlement. Behind the figures relating to our local economy we see a great many low-skilled and low-wage jobs, and we are not reaching the potential that we have as a region. According to one of the most indicative statistics, the investment going into the east midlands, whether private or public, is much lower than the investment going into other regions.

One option that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill presents us with is a devolution settlement. Over the last two years in this Parliament, I have been lucky enough to be Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and I have had insights into how various colleagues engage with Ministers here. One of the most striking things has been that regional Mayors work. They work as a way in which the private sector and the Government can engage with a particular area and help to bring investment, jobs, skills and education to it.

Unfortunately, the east midlands is fighting with one hand tied behind its back when it comes to competing with London, Manchester, the west midlands, South Yorkshire and Teesside. It is undoubtedly true that the Mayors of those areas are having a huge impact; they are becoming household names across the country. Anyone who wants to invest in the east midlands will have to speak to at least one county council, at least one district council and almost certainly the local enterprise partnership, which becomes cumbersome. Anyone who wants to invest in the west midlands can ring Andy Street's office, and that is a much easier process. Andy Street can then pick up the phone and talk to whoever he needs to talk to. Within this Queen's Speech and this Bill, we can find various ways for powers to descend to our regions, and that will empower us to create more economic growth locally.

Another thing that I am pleased to see in the Queen's Speech, again in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, relates to planning. For too long, there has been frustration that when housing comes to Bolsover, either it is through a salami-slicing approach of adding five or six houses to a village or it is a huge new estate that does not get the investment in the public services that need to come with it, such as a GP surgery or local school. We have a problem in that demand for those public services has gone up. The outline for the planning reforms is very strong, and if we are looking at levelling up an area such as Bolsover, we need to improve education and skills levels. We need to be able to bring skilled jobs to the area; we need affordable, quality housing; and we need to be able to bring in infrastructure that is fit for the 21st century.

There is an admirable line on public transport, which is that the Government would like to get the rest of the country's transport connectivity much closer to the

standard of London's. I do not expect Bolsover to get an underground system any time soon, but I suggest to the Transport Secretary that we would accept just a few new bus routes that actually work and that run beyond 7 o'clock in the evening. I admire the emphasis on ensuring that we have public transport, because the groups most impacted by a lack of it are the elderly, students and younger people, and those on low incomes. It is hard to generate economic growth without good public transport.

I am looking forward tremendously to the Schools Bill, because there are many positive things in it, but one of my great frustrations is that we have no post-16 education in Bolsover. That requires everybody to travel out, but our bus services are not fit for purpose.

I will end on this, Madam Deputy Speaker, because unlike some others, I will stick to six minutes. I very much welcome the conversion therapy Bill. The Government will know that I think it needs to go further, and I hope that that will happen. A number of colleagues have fought incredibly hard to ensure that this issue remains on the agenda, and I doff my cap to them because this is incredibly important and something that we should put an end to in the 21st century.

5.23 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): The Queen's Speech presents the Government of the day with an opportunity to stand back, take stock and realign their priorities. There are aspects of the new legislative programme that are welcome, and aspects that are less so. Most concerning are the things that are missing from it altogether. I will start with levelling up. Regardless of any personal views we might hold about the intricacies of the agenda or how it is implemented, I am sure that most of us would agree that the principle of targeted and meaningful local investment is not a bad thing. Each one of us could point to projects in our constituency that not only deserve such investment but would return it tenfold.

There is an enormous patch of derelict land at Shawfield in my constituency that had been vacant for decades. Opportunity was wasted because the land suffered from the big problem that, until recent years, nobody had the patience or the vision to invest the time and money to fix its contamination with hexavalent chromium, a carcinogenic chemical—anyone who has seen the movie "Erin Brockovich" will know how dangerous it is.

Remediating the site will cost tens of millions of pounds. Clyde Gateway, a publicly backed community regeneration project that reinvests its profits in new projects, has taken on this mammoth task. It has already remediated huge amounts of land, but the majority of the site is still unusable. The location is perfect, and Clyde Gateway has already proved with its redevelopment of remediated land that it is profitable. The site would serve as an excellent hub outside the Glasgow city centre boundary for businesses and residents alike. I have even heard rumours that the Cabinet Office has looked at some of the remediated land to house its offices.

The project is a no-brainer, and I hope it is successful in bidding for the levelling-up fund. It will transform the local economy, but it needs vision and funding. Through my extensive conversations with the executive

director of Clyde Gateway over the years, I have found that funding streams such as the levelling-up pot pose their own challenges. Although it is vital to ensure that public money is not frittered away, being too prescriptive stifles the ability to access and use the money to its fullest potential. I encourage the Government to consider how different project types, such as Shawfield, might be even more successful and economically beneficial to communities if their funding streams have more flexible criteria. Of course, the most important thing is to make sure that the levelling-up fund is distributed equitably across the four nations to projects that will bring the most economic value.

I am glad to see the Government finally bring forward plans for community access to cash, an issue on which I have bored Treasury Ministers to tears, as the most vulnerable in our communities are the most reliant on physical cash. Although we have accelerated our progress towards low reliance on cash over the past two years, it remains essential to protect cash and restore ease of access.

I look forward to the proposals on the sustainability of the ATM system, making sure all ATMs are free to customers without risking the affordability of maintenance for providers. I am also interested to see more of the measures on consumer rights and protections and the economic crime Bill, which is increasingly crucial at a time when people have less, if any, disposable income.

I spoke last week about Safe Hands funeral plans and the devastating impact of the company's collapse on victims who face losing thousands of pounds they simply cannot afford to lose. I agree that strengthening this area of our statute book is essential. We need strong reform of limited partnerships and the role of Companies House, although I reserve judgment on the efficacy of the Government's proposals until the details become clearer.

I am also eager to see the energy security Bill. It is high time—to be honest, it is too late—that the Government addressed the price crisis that is hitting households so hard. Over the past few months, this issue has been high on the list of reasons for constituents to seek support from my office. It has been so frustrating to see the Government offer so little to help the millions who are struggling to keep up. It is not just households, either: there is currently no price cap for businesses, and smaller businesses are finding themselves at real financial risk. The Government advertise themselves as the party of business, so they must do more to back up that claim.

There are quite a few Bills that we need to see in detail as soon as possible, including the Brexit freedoms Bill to address retained EU law, the Bill of Rights and the national security Bill.

I said I would return to the things that are missing from the Queen's Speech, and I will focus on a big one. This year's Queen's Speech skirted neatly around the very large elephant in the room—an elephant that, for some reason, the Government are determined to ignore. At the very least, they do not want to make eye contact with it, perhaps because they know that, at the end of the day, they can leave the metaphorical room. Everyone else though—our constituents, the taxpayers and voters—is stuck in that room, eye to eye with the elephant, every single day. The room gets tighter, conditions worsen and the walls are constantly closing in. There is no sunlight and, seemingly, no escape. The Government failed to adequately account for the single biggest, most immediate and pressing crisis this country is facing: the

cost of living. We are all acutely aware of it, and colleagues on Benches across the House will agree that we are fortunate that we do not feel it in quite the same way as many of our constituents do. The only way to achieve economic growth is to invest in our people. The Government are not doing enough of that, and that is incredibly short sighted.

5.30 pm

**Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate, which has ranged over the entire Queen's Speech in the past four hours. It has been interesting to hear Opposition Members make the case both for tax rises and for tax cuts, and I enjoyed the case made on the lack of desirability of economic growth. I am in the camp where economic growth is largely a good thing, although this is not without some reservations in certain circumstances.

I serve on the Treasury Committee, where we take evidence from a range of different economists the whole time. The good news is that the UK economy is fundamentally strong. However, we have had too low growth for too long, and we are facing unprecedented challenges, as many people have mentioned. We have had a pandemic and a war, and before that we had a global financial crisis. Someone described the Chancellor as the "unlucky Chancellor" and that is absolutely true, as he has faced greater challenges than any Chancellor since probably the second world war, but he has dealt admirably with the challenges thrown at him. We have inflation at a 40-year high, which is causing a lot of challenges to a lot of households, as we have been hearing this afternoon. But that it not purely a UK thing; it is a global inflation crisis.

I wish to put on record my continued support for Bank of England independence. The Governor of the Bank of England appeared before the Treasury Committee earlier this week, and various media reports questioned that independence, saying, "This shows that the Bank of England cannot be trusted with inflation." That is not true. Monetary policy was never suited to and never aimed at dealing with the current global supply shock—it is not the right tool. That does not mean that the system we have for the Bank of England is not working. It has worked very well over the past 25 years and the way to judge it is whether it brings inflation back in the next year or two to the 2%.

One mystery in economics at the moment, as we find in our Treasury Committee hearings, is how well the economy is going. Two years ago, when the pandemic started, we had all these apocalyptic—that word has come back into fashion—forecasts about the economy and how we were going to have the deepest recession ever, and that unemployment would go back up to 1980s levels of 3 million or so. As various Members have mentioned, however, unemployment is now at a historic low—it is at its lowest since 1974. For the first time ever, we have more vacancies than people who are unemployed and claiming benefit. We need to work hard to make sure that those unemployed people get into those vacancies. Obviously, we still have a big budget deficit, but that is getting managed down, and taxes are heading up. I am with my right hon. Friends the Members for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) on the case they made that taxes are too high and should come down. That must be the medium-term trajectory.



[Anthony Browne]

A lot of this afternoon's debate has been about the cost of living. I do not want to reiterate a lot of the points that have been made, so I will focus on the title of the debate, "Achieving economic growth". There are reasons for that; a lot of the problems we face as a country could be solved by higher economic growth. It leads to higher incomes, which helps with the cost of living, and to higher tax receipts, which helps with funding tax cuts. That is why I welcome the Government's drive to promote economic growth. I keep saying that their priority should be, "Growth, growth, growth". The Chief Secretary highlighted the Government's strategy of improving skills, infrastructure and innovation, and I fully support that. Obviously, many of the measures needed to promote economic growth are fiscal—they are related to taxes—and are reserved for a Budget rather than a Queen's Speech. For example, in the spring statement the Government outlined their ambition to use tax cuts to promote business investment. Those measures will be enacted in the autumn Budget, which is welcome.

Many measures in the Gracious Speech will drive up national productivity in the medium or longer term. The education reforms and investment in skills that others have talked about, the transport improvements, and the reforms to the planning system will all help to promote economic growth. I want to focus, though, on the Bills that are aimed directly at businesses, about which not many people have talked. There are 38 Bills in the Queen's Speech and many of them relate directly to businesses or specific industries.

The digital markets, competition and consumer Bill is most welcome. The almost duopolistic grip of Google and Facebook on electronic advertising is not good for businesses, competition, innovation or consumers. Google frequently reforms its algorithms in ways that are detrimental to ordinary businesses that rely on online advertising. They are forced to pay for expensive adverts if they want to reach their customers. Google also sets itself up in competition with businesses in a way that shows a clear conflict of interest and that damages innovation. For example, Google directs those who search "cheap flights to New York" to its own flight-comparison service rather than to independent companies such as Skyscanner or Expedia.

The Government are absolutely right to give the Competition and Markets Authority powers to protect consumers, ensure the integrity of digital markets and stop market abuse by dominant players. It is, though, a fiendishly complex policy area, and the law will work only if the new digital markets unit in the CMA is properly funded and can offer competitive salaries for highly skilled staff, so that they are not immediately poached by industry—in the same way that the Financial Conduct Authority can offer sufficient pay to make sure its staff are not lured away by the City.

The UK Infrastructure Bank Bill is long overdue. I used to work at Morgan Stanley investment bank, which does a lot of infrastructure finance, and not only is it often very complex, but there are limits to the risks that any private bank can take on in respect of massive projects. The power of the state is needed to arrange suitable financing. When I worked at City Hall in London, I was involved in sorting out the finance for Crossrail—or the

Elizabeth line, as it is now known—and I really look forward to riding it next week. London was lucky to have the highly skilled finance team at Transport for London to help to arrange the financing for that £20 billion project, but most infrastructure projects do not come with such pre-formed finance teams. We need to leverage different forms of finance, including by attracting private investment, and there is a clearly defined role for the UK Infrastructure Bank, but, as with the digital markets unit and Bill, the proof will be in the delivery. It is essential not only that the UK Infrastructure Bank can operate independently from political pressures, but that it is funded so that it can attract high-quality staff.

On the non-domestic rating Bill, the business rates system is a massive source of complaints—often justified—from businesses and needs to be modernised. The Bill will do that, but let me float one little thought. A cap on business rates of 10% of a company's declared turnover would help start-up companies and a lot of smaller businesses without damaging the revenue received from larger companies. I am sure the devil will be in the details, but it is worth the Treasury considering that.

On the genetic technology Bill, such technology is very big in my constituency—I probably have more genetic and genomic companies locally than any other constituency. The Bill is a huge opportunity for us, and it is quite possibly a Brexit opportunity, too. It is about not genetically modified organisms but gene editing, which is very different. It is about speeding up the breeding that happens naturally.

We should have introduced an electronic trade documents Bill before. I cannot believe it requires legislation, but it will slip through Parliament quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) mentioned the audit reform Bill—I think he has been the only one to do so. Everyone in finance knows that there is a major problem with auditing. It has always been in the "too difficult" box, the "too complex" box or the "I just don't understand it" box. Thank God it is now being addressed, because we need that Bill to stop the series of scandals that have happened as a result of bad auditing.

On the Procurement Bill, I was heavily involved in procurement when I worked at City Hall, and the EU rules on public sector procurement that we inherited were horrendously over-engineered to stop abuse across 28 different countries with 28 different procurement cultures and so on. They are a severe constraint on an effective and efficient public sector—often, the Government cannot deliver what they want because of procurement rules—and we absolutely need to streamline them.

Finally, the financial services and markets Bill is a huge piece of legislation. We have looked at it a lot in the Treasury Committee, and I look forward to taking part in the debates on it when it comes to the House. It is the UK's dirty secret that we had far more influence on the EU's financial services legislation than any other EU member. That legislation is therefore not that bad overall, but compromises were often made, which meant that in a lot of ways it is not appropriate for a global financial centre such as the UK. We can make many reforms to it that will help our global competitiveness.

There are real issues for Parliament here. It is right to give regulators more powers, absolutely, rather than relying on everything being in primary and statutory

legislation, but that means that regulators must have more effective scrutiny. Parliament is not currently set up to do that, and we need to agree on how we can more effectively hold financial regulators to account.

Overall, the Queen's Speech has a very wide package of measures to promote business, help consumers and drive up economic growth, and I strongly recommend it to the House.

5.39 pm

**Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): Today, I wish to focus on three key issues. The first is the cost of living crisis, which is the No. 1 issue facing the country. My constituents in Coventry North West have suffered months of sky-rocketing fuel bills, soaring inflation and hikes at the petrol pump. Sadly, this has been met by a carefree response from this Conservative Government whose policies are pushing many below the poverty line.

The crisis has been hitting my constituents hard since last summer, yet the Government are still not adequately supporting them. When I surveyed hundreds of my constituents recently, a massive 88% said that they did not expect their income to keep up with rising energy bills. Despite that, none of the 38 Bills outlined in the Queen's Speech offered any specific or effective measures to tackle the cost of living crisis. That is why the Government must accept Labour's plan to introduce a windfall tax on gas and oil companies that have reported record profits, and that would go a long way to providing a cut to energy bills of up to £600 per household. The Government must finally wake up to the urgency of the crisis on the ground.

Secondly, I wish to speak about planning rules and new housing developments, and the impact that they are having on certain communities. Across the communities of Holbrook, Allesley, Keresley, and Eastern Green in my constituency of Coventry North West, many of my constituents have real and heartfelt anxieties about the impact of large-scale new development and its devastating impact on greenbelt land.

For years now, I have heard constituents warning that the current planning rules are not fit for purpose. They say that they currently serve developers' greed and do nothing to address the needs of local people and those who are most impacted. In Coventry, this means that the wrong type of houses are being built. They are built in the wrong part of the city and, eventually, are sold at an unaffordable price. From start to finish, the system is a mess and it is broken. Tens of thousands of new homes have been imposed on my city of Coventry in recent years, against the wishes of residents and their elected councillors.

Equally, the rules concerning new developments do nothing to guarantee that new homes will come with the necessary added infrastructure. That means that large-scale housing developments are being built without the necessary infrastructure, such as decent public transport, good-quality broadband connectivity, improved roads, green spaces, and extra local services, such as schools and GP surgeries.

What we have heard so far from the Queen's Speech goes nowhere near reaching the key issues affecting my constituents. What we have are mere gestures towards a more democratic planning system, which will not fix the problems in Coventry or elsewhere across the country.

My final issue concerns healthcare and the future of our beloved NHS. Our NHS is struggling to keep up with increased and more complex demands, and it is finding it increasingly difficult to clear the backlog created by the pandemic. Let us look at our ambulance service as an example. In the west midlands, ambulance services are receiving more 999 calls than at any time in history, and yet, simultaneously, our region is facing crippling ambulance shortages. In my own city of Coventry, just days ago, a woman suffering from a heart attack had to wait two-and-a-half hours for the ambulance to show up. That is heartbreaking and it cannot go on. However, this is only part of the problem. Health services in the community are at breaking point following the failure of successive Conservative Governments to recruit more GPs and to roll out additional GP surgeries. Every morning, dozens of my constituents have to wait on the phone line, often for up to an hour, just to try to book an appointment with their GP. Too often, when they finally get through to somebody at their surgery, they find that all the appointments are booked up or that the next available appointment is not for weeks.

Frustratingly, although the Government have already admitted that they will fail to fulfil their pledge to recruit 6,000 extra GPs by 2024, and although those shortages are making life exceedingly difficult for many of my constituents, there was nothing announced in the Queen's Speech to tackle this health crisis. Labour, however, has a very clear plan. We would make reducing waiting times and boosting staffing numbers in our NHS a top priority in government. Until this Government understand its importance, the problem will not go away.

One subject that was outlined in Queen's Speech was women's health, but, like so many other critical issues, it got empty words and no concrete promises. Many women continue to face appalling healthcare inequalities. For example, more than half a million women face horrendously long waiting times for gynaecology care.

The Government have repeatedly promised to prioritise addressing women's health issues with a long-awaited women's health strategy. However, they have failed again and again to deliver that strategy. It was meant to be delivered by Christmas last year, but that never happened, and we are still waiting for it five months later. If the Government genuinely want to do right by women's health, they must urgently publish a comprehensive and intersectional women's health strategy. Until then, they will continue to fail in their duty to provide world-class healthcare to every woman in this country.

This Tory Government have been in power for over 12 years now, and they appear to have entirely run out of energy and ideas. Whether on the cost of living crisis, housing or healthcare, the Government are first to deliver a soundbite, but last to deliver the lasting changes that the people of this country need. This Queen's Speech should have been the opportunity to address some of the many complex challenges that we face. Instead, it was yet another demonstration of the Government's disinterest in delivering for my constituents in Coventry North West. They, and the people of this country, deserve so much better.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. The wind-ups will start no later than 6.30 pm, so six minutes, please. I am not imposing the time limit, but you will be really unfair to whoever is coming last if you do more.

5.47 pm

**Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi). She made a typically punchy and political speech with much to disagree on.

I do agree with the hon. Member on her diagnosis of the current issues with the planning system. There the agreement stops, however, because I am optimistic about the solutions proposed to democratise the system and make planning fairer and more transparent. There is much more work to do getting stuck into the detail, but optimism trumps pessimism on this account.

Planning and development is not the only challenge this country faces, of course. We have dealt with many challenges—the biggest challenges facing our country in living memory—and it has been the innovation of our people, our Government and our businesses that has got us through it. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), who is not in his place now, pointed out earlier that private sector innovation is key to unlocking economic growth, the subject of this debate. Government innovation also helped us to get through the crisis. Both the unprecedented furlough scheme and the brilliant kickstart scheme, put together in a targeted, interventionist way, have helped us to become the fastest-growing economy in the G7 and to build back better.

I am glad to see that this innovative thinking has continued through Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. Importantly, that innovation will drive up skills and economic growth in my Milton Keynes North constituency, truly putting us on the map as the Silicon Valley of Europe. I understand that that is a bold claim to make: how can we compete with the tech giants of the United States? However, it would be unwise to underestimate the people and the businesses of Milton Keynes. In Milton Keynes we have a proud record of harnessing innovation, entrepreneurialism and creativity to tackle the challenges of the modern world.

We are home to many exciting technological innovations such as driverless car trials. We therefore welcome the transport Bill and the unashamedly pro-technology approach that the Government are taking. The transport Bill will truly revolutionise the way we travel, bringing the benefits to the environment and to people. For those who are vulnerable in our communities—who struggle with mobility or their sight—self-driving vehicles will be transformative, connecting them to the outside world and ensuring their independence. With the UK market set to be worth about £41 billion by 2030—that is 6.4% of the global market, so we can have a bigger slice of that pie—it is vital that the United Kingdom leads the way in the development of this technology. The transport Bill will be the first step to doing that.

But if we are truly to look towards the future, I hope that the Bill can go further. Those who have visited Milton Keynes, or indeed heard me bang on about Milton Keynes in the past few years, will have seen or heard of our much-loved Starship robots buzzing along our streets delivering our groceries—food, coffees, and even beers to a barbecue, if you happen to run out of beers, as in my experience. They may be small in stature but they are mighty in the positive impact that they have. They have not only supported local business but helped to solve the problems of the last mile of delivery—the most expensive and carbon-intensive part of the supply chain.

These robots have helped to remove nearly 400,000 kg of carbon from the atmosphere and have taken over three quarters of a million miles of car journeys off the roads in Milton Keynes. I encourage the Minister to ensure that the scope of the transport Bill supports and enables the expansion of companies such as Starship, bringing us closer to our net zero targets and our ambition to embrace the technologies of the future.

Yet if we hope to see this technology in action and being a success, we need to ensure that we have the skills and jobs to sustain it. The best way to do this is through investing in and levelling up our education. Whether through the Schools Bill or through the lifetime skills guarantee, this Government are providing people of all ages and backgrounds with the right opportunities to succeed. While it is right that we provide those opportunities, I urge the Government also to consider investing in the institutions that will be able to deliver the teaching of these vital skills. We need to teach the skills for the jobs that we cannot even conceive of yet. Those institutions include Milton Keynes University—a pioneer in the education field. MKU represents a new approach to higher education that is designed with business and for business to give students the skills and knowledge they need to meet the needs of our local economy, both now and in future. Degree apprenticeships in robot engineering or cyber-security may seem alien now to some of us in this House, but these graduates will be leading the charge in future years. With that in mind, I implore colleagues in the Treasury to consider the case for MKU more thoroughly, as it will transform our economy at both a local and a national level.

I truly feel that this will be a critical year for Milton Keynes, as we are expected to have one of the UK's fastest-growing economies over the next two years, but to maximise that growth, we must invest in the skills, technologies and institutions of the future.

5.53 pm

**Kim Leadbeater** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in my first Queen's Speech debate.

The Prime Minister likes to pose as a man of action, but where in this Queen's Speech is the bold and transformational action needed to tackle the most pressing and urgent crisis facing people across the country—the cost of living, as we have heard many times over the past few days? Families in my constituency do not want vague promises of help to come some time, maybe. They do not want to be patronised and told that things will be better in a few years' time. They need an emergency Budget now, with immediate help to reduce their bills along with a plan for growth that offers them financial security for the long term. People struggling day to day and week to week are being let down by a Government presiding over a low-growth, high-inflation, high-tax economy. The Government talk about levelling up, but in reality they are hammering our communities down with an ever greater financial burden that shows no sign of easing.

Hardly a day goes by without one Minister or another on our TV screens showing just how out of touch they are with the people of this country. People are facing real hardship, unable to pay bills, skipping meals, turning the heating off and relying on food banks to survive, all of which are taking a real toll on their mental health. I have been contacted by suicide prevention organisations



in my constituency that are busier than ever. Indeed, I have just been to a powerful event with Mr Speaker and the brilliant band New Order, organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), as today is the 42nd anniversary of the tragic suicide of Ian Curtis.

What do Ministers say to people who are struggling? They say, “Try and get a different job”, or “Work more hours”, or “Eat own brand food”. Unpaid carers and people on fixed-term pensions cannot change jobs or do an extra shift. The Government add insult to injury by writing off £11.8 billion in fraud and error. It was their error, not that of our constituents. It is insulting, it exposes their own inaction, and it shows their total inability as a Government to put in place an economic plan that can work for all the people of this country.

While the poorest households are being hit hardest, many families who until recently thought they were reasonably secure now also feel incredibly vulnerable. A serving police officer in my constituency got in touch with me recently. He is on a decent wage, but due to the huge increases in his essential outgoings, by the end of the month he faces the prospect of not being able to afford to put petrol in his car. He searches the aisles of the supermarket for yellow-stickered discounted food for his kids, and they share bathwater to cut down on costs. When he gets to work, he sees the wider impact of the crisis with the soaring number of emergency mental health incidents he has to attend, and he is not alone.

A family of four with both parents in full-time employment emailed me, scared for their future. They are struggling, and through no fault of their own, they are relying on credit cards and facing a battle just to reach payday. What hope are we offering them and their kids? There is nothing today, and they face the prospect of their already tight family budget being stretched to breaking point by inflation and wages failing to keep up with rising prices.

On the Opposition Benches, we believe in putting in place the urgent steps needed to provide an economy that allows the benefits of higher growth and investment to be shared by all, and not just the privileged, and an economy based on fair taxation, where loopholes are closed, and those who make huge profits while their customers are hit with ever higher bills—such as the producers of North sea oil and gas—are asked to contribute more, which is something they themselves say they are ready to do. I am not anti-business—far from it—but we need a fairer economy that brings good jobs into our communities and puts pride back into our towns, but this Queen’s Speech did not provide the vision, the ambition or the foundations for an economy that will work for the people of Batley and Spen and the people of this country.

I will always try to be fair to Ministers, although they do not always make it easy. There were Bills in this Queen’s Speech that address some important issues, such as online safety, victims, schools and mental health, and I look forward to debating them in this Chamber, but until we address the most pressing issue of the day—the highest inflation and greatest pressure on living standards in a generation—we are letting down our constituents when they need us most and widening the economic gaps that are holding our communities back. That is why I am calling on the Government to

take some action, show some urgency and show some compassion to tackle the very real cost of living crisis that so many of our constituents are facing.

5.58 pm

**Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate this afternoon and to follow the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater). I will reserve my comments on achieving economic growth to the rural areas of the United Kingdom. I particularly advocate for my constituency of West Dorset.

The Queen’s Speech contained a number of welcome Bills, including the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, the transport Bill, the Procurement Bill and, importantly, the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill.

West Dorset is a very rural constituency, covering 400 square miles. Thirty per cent. of the population is over 65 and one in 12 is over 80. Eighty-five per cent. of all our funding comes from local taxation, and two thirds of our council tax goes to support those needing social care. It is constituencies such as mine that have a really strong requirement for regeneration and levelling up in a way that sometimes this House does not quite recognise. The default view of West Dorset is that it is a particularly well-off place, but I can tell the House that many parts are far from it. West Dorset is in as much need as anywhere of levelling up, especially as we are one of the few authorities to have zero revenue support grant, despite having one of the highest council tax rates in the country.

I am particularly pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Brexit Opportunities is on the Treasury Bench this afternoon. I was delighted to welcome him to West Dorset just a few weeks ago to talk about some of the challenges and difficulties we face. In West Dorset, 97% of our businesses are small or micro-sized. The pandemic was very harsh to us: 6,500 very small businesses existed before the pandemic; 5,500 are there now. So I was delighted to learn from my right hon. Friend that the procurement Bill will help those very small and micro-sized businesses to tap into the procurement system. For far too long, those businesses have been held back from accessing that system because of bureaucracy or European rules and legislation. Such things as approved suppliers lists will, I understand, be reviewed. I think that will mean an enormous amount to constituencies such as mine, with such a high proportion of small and micro-sized businesses.

Many in this House know that, for 20 years before I was elected in 2019, I worked for the railways. That is one of the reasons I am delighted to see the transport Bill feature in the Queen’s Speech. Bus and rail services have also been a contentious matter in West Dorset. I have the worst frequency rail line in the country—a three-hourly train frequency—that many often do not recognise. Inter-regional rail connectivity is also very poor, which is another reason I am delighted that we will have a transport Bill that will reform the railways and bring lots of opportunity and in particular take full advantage of regional connectivity, meaning that, where we see franchise boundaries precluding sensible cross-regional connectivity measures, we will have the opportunity to fully review those.

West Dorset is a very agricultural area as well. Agriculture plays an enormous part in the local economy. For that reason, and as a farmer’s son, I am delighted to see that

[Chris Loder]

the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill will be coming back in this parliamentary Session. It contains a lot of important measures that I would have liked us to have dealt with before, but I am pleased that it is to come back. Animal worrying is a considerable problem for our sheep farmers in and around West Dorset, and the Bill will put the responsibility on dog owners to keep their dogs under control. I hope that, during our debates on the Bill, we will also discuss the unnecessary non-stun slaughter of animals for supply chain purposes.

I am delighted to be able to support the Queen's Speech. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Brexit Opportunities is present to hear my points and to reiterate the conversation we had when he visited West Dorset. I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

6.4 pm

**Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): Like the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater), this is my first Queen's Speech debate. For a Queen's Speech delivered during a cost of living crisis, this year's address was regrettably notable for its lack of urgency or solutions. As we have all been hearing, inflation is now at 9%—the highest in over 40 years—and people are struggling to imagine how they can make ends meet, let alone make it. The notion that people can solve the crisis by taking cooking classes or working longer hours is as tone deaf as it is offensive.

The Government talk a lot about levelling up, but in my constituency we see vital local services disappearing before our eyes. I could talk about the loss of multiple bank branches locally, or about protracted postal delays due to Ofcom's failure to hold Royal Mail to its universal service requirements, but as I only have a short amount of time, I will focus my remarks on questions that cannot afford to be ignored.

With their commitment to making streets safer, I had hoped that the Government would pay some attention to local policing. They talk a good game about their commitment to recruit extra police officers, yet in our local force—Thames Valley police—we were promised an additional 609 officers by the end of May 2023; instead, they were down 29 officers in 2021. This is why I was particularly disappointed to hear that, rather than focusing on provision to improve local policing, the Home Office plans to spend this parliamentary Session attempting to force through draconian legislation that was so recently rejected during consideration of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

On future development, my constituents made no secret of their distaste for the Government's previous planning White Paper. As such, I am glad that the Government appear to have heard the voices of the people of Chesham and Amersham and dropped those proposals. Having been made to think again, the Government are now looking to give communities more say over developments in their area. I only hope that the results live up to the billing.

I am pleased to see that there will be more emphasis on environmental considerations within that legislation. Without a doubt, the planning system plays a big part in protecting our natural environment. However, I am disappointed at the lack of stand-alone environmental

legislation. In the UK, some areas of outstanding natural beauty are in decline, yet we are continuing to destroy unique and precious habitats, ancient woodlands and globally scarce chalk streams in my constituency alone. If we are to halt this decline and protect our environment for future generations, we need specific protections to do so. I have previously suggested a special designation and enhanced protection for chalk streams, and I again urge the Government to consider that.

Finally, on transport, the Government have committed to improve reliability for passengers, but I am sure fellow Buckinghamshire Members will share my disappointment that our local council received no funding for bus service improvement plans. I ask the Government what their plan is to improve transport connectivity in regions such as ours which were overlooked. The neglect of Chesham and Amersham's transport services is particularly ironic given that our community is obliged to watch as ever-increasing amounts of money are poured into the HS2 project, which brings nothing to our area but pollution, congestion and destruction. The Government's blinkered approach means they are simply ploughing on ahead, despite spiralling costs and an environmental impact far greater than estimated. I urge the Government, before the High Speed Rail (Crewe—Manchester) Bill is brought before this place, to please pause, assess the damage already done and undertake a fresh cost-benefit analysis of the project that takes into consideration the many changes that have occurred since hon. Members regrettably consented to it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** That was well within six minutes—well done.

6.8 pm

**Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): I rise to support the Queen's Speech, its 38 Bills and its broad legislative agenda. I thought the opening paragraph of my speech would not be too disagreeable, but after listening to some of the comments this afternoon, I still firmly believe that efficiently managing our economy and stimulating growth is absolutely a key priority that this Government should be helping us through, in what will undoubtedly be one of the most challenging scenarios of the last 75 years.

I think we are all in absolutely no doubt about the challenges ahead, but rather than dwell on those challenges, what we need to be doing when we debate achieving economic growth is talking about confidence—confidence in our economy and confidence in our businesses—because that is what they absolutely need. As constituency MPs, we have a fundamental duty, I feel, to be talking about confidence in our own representative communities, including confidence to invest and confidence to recruit into a market where opportunities are plentiful. We have heard many times this afternoon that we have more jobs than we have ever had before for people. We have the lowest unemployment since the 1970s. We have to have the confidence that people can go out there and that businesses can match them with the skills they are looking for. Then we will drive the growth agenda that we need. That is what is expected, and what is indeed happening, in my rural constituency of North Norfolk.

Rather like with buses, Mr Deputy Speaker, you sit here for nearly five hours and nobody talks about the rural economy, and then my hon. Friend the Member

for West Dorset (Chris Loder) comes along—not that I would ever liken him to a bus. When we stimulate local growth, we foster and support thriving communities. That does not just apply to towns and cities; it also applies to rural areas and North Norfolk is just one of those areas set to benefit. What better place can Members think of than somewhere with swathes of glorious rolling countryside, sprinkled with picturesque towns and villages? Businesses are making a significant contribution to local and national economic growth, and the east is a net contributor to the economy—to the Chancellor and the Treasury. We should not forget that.

We should also recognise that the pandemic has taught us many things. Remote working has changed everything. Places such as my beautiful constituency have never before provided the kind of work-life balance that the pandemic has opened our eyes to. It is estimated that rural businesses across the country make up 28% of England's firms and contribute at least 19% of gross value added to the English economy. Rural areas have more business start-ups per head of population than many urban areas, and most have enormous amounts of manufacturing businesses. Those businesses can be small, medium or large, but all of them contribute immensely to the surrounding areas and the national economy.

Whenever I have talked about levelling up, I have said that we must not forget our rural areas. I want to show that there is confidence in the future, and so does a serial entrepreneur called William Sachiti, who is the real leader here—I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) has disappeared, but it is interesting that this issue has been brought up twice in the space of half an hour. William Sachiti is a tech entrepreneur who is relocating the headquarters of his robotics company, Academy of Robotics, to a former military base in my constituency in quite literally the middle of nowhere. In doing so, he is placing the vanguard of driverless vehicle technology and development in my county. Many have already described the company as the closest thing we have to Tesla in the UK.

If there is a better way of demonstrating that we can achieve economic growth through the suite of Bills in the Queens' Speech than the businesses opening in my constituency, I do not know what it is. This business, which has already been valued at \$100 million, will deliver the benefits of high-skilled jobs and bring real talent into my constituency.

I hope that goes some way towards showing how integral rural areas are to our economy. They are quite often the economic drivers of growth. As we move out of the pandemic, it is vital that we recognise that and the inherent potential of businesses in the rural economy, and realise that there are no barriers any more to where people can start a business and enable it to thrive. Just like levelling up, economic growth is not the preserve of metropolitan areas any more but for the whole country. I know that the Government will deliver on this.

6.14 pm

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): There is something liberating about coming in at nearly the end of the debate, Mr Deputy Speaker. Knowing that you do not have much time to get your points across, you tend to get right to it, so I will.

I want to talk about not only economic growth, which we all understand the importance of, but the sustainability of that growth and the type of economy that it seeks to create, which is similar to what the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) was talking about earlier in the debate.

The cost of living is the order of the day, as it should be, but for all the talk of economic shocks and external factors that we cannot avoid, many of the largest price rises have come in areas where the Government on these islands have decided they no longer have a role to play, abdicating their national responsibility. I think in particular of energy storage and transportation—I say that as my attention has been to the news that Russia has decided to stop energy exports to Finland the day after it announced its intention to join NATO. That decision was met with a shrug by the Finns, who had been planning for such an eventuality and have avoided the Russian energy trap that so many other European states have sleepwalked into. Resilience is built into Finnish society, and its economy plays as much of a role in the defence of the homeland as its military. That is key to avoiding the temptation to fall back on the easy gains of what some call balance-sheet capitalism.

If the House will indulge me, I will quote a paragraph from the introduction to Brett Christophers' excellent overview of the modern UK economy, "Rentier Capitalism", which nicely encapsulates the quandary that this place will find itself in when trying to legislate for inclusive and sustained growth:

"A form of capitalism geared principally to doing pays heed to the balance sheet only to the extent that assets facilitate and liabilities mitigate profitable making or providing, or whatever else a business does. For a form of capitalism structured by contrast around 'having'—rentier capitalism, in other words: a mode of economic organisation in which success is based principally on what you control, not what you do—the balance sheet is the be-all and end-all."

In this political state, as successive Governments—blue and red—have sought to keep the City of London onside, unthinking deregulation has been the order of the day, and a rentier capitalist system has been created. That may have kept stakeholders happy, but as we stare down the barrel of massive utility price rises, I am not sure that our constituents, including mine in West Dunbartonshire, always have been. A Government who own and maintain the fundamental pieces of infrastructure that allow entrepreneurs to proliferate and thrive is one who can keep an eye on the horizon and ensure that our fundamental national interests are upheld, and the temptation to put shareholder interests ahead of citizen interests is avoided.

My contribution to this area is a paper published with Stuart Evers by the Progressive Policy Research Group last year regarding the ownership and regulation of telecoms infrastructure. As we get our head around the challenges that have been mentioned and the opportunities presented to us by the new digital economy, it is imperative that the keystone industries of the economy are kept principally in public hands, not only because extracting private rents from them is unfair but because that allows us to get back to focusing on an economy that actually does things. It will surprise no one in the House if I say that I cannot see a way in which this political state can extract itself from under the dead hand of the UK's rentier economy, so I draw the conclusion that so many of my fellow Scots increasingly do: it is only through



[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

independence that Scotland can create an economy that is fairer for all of us, in which growth is sustainable and whose foundations are resilient enough to face the economic headwinds we are heading into. I only hope that the Government will allow us to make that decision for ourselves.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. Tahir Ali will be the last Back Bencher to speak before the wind-ups, so any Member who has participated in the debate should make their way back to the Chamber for the wind-ups.

6.18 pm

**Tahir Ali** (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): The Queen's Speech clearly comes from a beleaguered Government who have run out of ideas and lost the ability to show leadership in a time of acute crisis. As several of my colleagues have made abundantly clear, the lack of measures to address the cost of living is an indictment of the Government and demonstrates their complete disregard for everybody struggling and working in the UK. Inflation continues to rise, and the Bank of England is warning of an imminent recession. With wages stagnant, my constituents in Birmingham, Hall Green and consumers across the country are cutting back on spending as the cost of essentials such as energy and food skyrockets. While energy companies amass record profits, small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency, in high streets and in local centres, struggle with rising costs and less income. The cost of living crisis threatens to become a vicious cycle, whereby working people struggle to make ends meet, small and medium-sized businesses struggle to stay afloat and people's jobs are put at risk. Rather than levelling up, this crisis threatens a downward spiral.

Bereft of ideas, the Government have not even done what they usually do and stolen Labour policies. The Government have ignored our calls for a windfall tax on oil and gas companies, as demonstrated in last night's vote, which would help to raise significant revenue to assist those struggling to pay their energy bills. Nothing has been said about low pay and stagnant wages, nothing on how rising interest rates will increase mortgage costs and rents, nothing on the scourge of insecure work and fire and rehire, and nothing on child poverty and the staff retention crisis in our hard-hit primary and secondary schools.

The new Brexit freedoms Bill threatens to further undermine parliamentary scrutiny of important legislation—yet another attempt by this Government to avoid accountability. Where positive measures have been announced, such as ending no-fault evictions for renters, the Government have accompanied them with draconian nonsense such as criminalising the homeless for rough sleeping.

The missed opportunities do not end there. The new proposals for street votes on extensions and conservatories provide a compelling model for local democracy, but one sadly wasted on relatively minor matters. The Government have been made well aware of the problems with exempt accommodation in my city of Birmingham and in my constituency. Local people are demanding a voice in decision making on whether Government

Departments establish so-called exempt accommodation in their neighbourhoods. That would be a far more suitable issue around which to develop street votes and local democracy than whether someone wants a conservatory or an extension on their street.

The real achievement of the Queen's Speech was to use so many words to say so little of substance. The people of this country were looking to this Government to show courage and leadership at a time of great need. Instead, all they got were more missed opportunities and hot air.

6.22 pm

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): It is a real privilege to close the final debate on the Queen's Speech tonight after more than 30 contributions from colleagues on all sides.

I want to start with a candid admission of jealousy. Every time I see a Government present a Queen's Speech I am envious of the right they have to lay out not just one Bill or one measure but a full, comprehensive programme, a chance to address the many issues our country faces. What an opportunity that is. For this Government, with their large majority and now in the delivery stage of this Parliament, what a moment this should be after 12 years in power. The Queen's Speech should be the crowning glory of everything the Government are about, but can any reasonable person say that it matched that moment, that it seized the opportunities of the future?

In a list of 38 Bills, we should all be able to find one or two things we like, but can we say that it lives up to the fundamental challenges being faced in homes across the country? Like many Members today, I am moved to ask: is this really it? We selected this debate to outline a vision for the future, but the Government have quite literally sent a vision of the past. The test for the Queen's Speech was whether it could deliver both the short-term relief and the long-term plan for growth that this country needs, but it has surely failed on both counts.

Many colleagues mentioned the news that inflation has hit a 40-year high, rising to 9%. It is the highest one-year increase in consumer prices since records began. People are grappling with impossible decisions and they are rightly looking to this place for action. The average energy bill has gone up by more than £1,000 this year. The food shop has gone up by 5%, and the Bank of England has warned of further "apocalyptic" food price rises. Putting petrol in the car has jumped up by £20 a time. Since January, 2 million people in our country have gone a whole day without eating because they simply cannot afford to do so.

Those are not just statistics and headlines; they are about real people—our friends, neighbours and constituents. We can do something about it, because these are all symptoms of a much deeper problem. At the heart of the difficulty we face is the fact that our economy has not grown as it should have done since the Conservatives came to power. That is not a contested argument; it is a fact. Economic growth under the Conservatives has been slower than the historical average, and slower than under the last Labour Government. Sadly, this Queen's Speech showed that the Government cannot, or will not, take the action needed to rectify that.

In contrast, our position is that our economy can and must do better. We believe that the UK needs greater investment in net zero. We believe that we need a real reform agenda on such things as business rates. We believe that we need a modern industrial strategy that provides a route for every business and worker in this country to fulfil their true potential.

That ambition, that hunger for change, was shown in my hon. Friends' contributions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) talked about the urgent need to overcome the problems that UK businesses are having exporting into the single market. My hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) and for Slough (Mr Dhesi) talked about job security being essential to wellbeing, yet the employment Bill is nowhere to be seen. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) talked of the new opportunities available to manufacturing and the need for private investment in the UK to capitalise on them. My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater) called for transformational, bold thinking and gave examples from her constituency about what the contemporary situation means. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), in perhaps the phrase of the debate, called this more of a "gracious intervention" than a Gracious Speech, and he is surely right.

Even among Government Members, the frustrations were evident. The right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) raised legitimate points about the media Bill and the creative industries. The hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) asked why the audit reform Bill is just in draft form when it is supposed to be a priority. The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) again admirably raised points about small business lending, and he was right to do so. Lots of Government Members, including the right hon. Members for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne), pointed out that taxes on working people are too high. They are very high under this Government.

From listening to the whole debate, it seemed to me that with the Government having had a policy to cut corporation tax, which they have now abandoned; having tried an embryonic industrial strategy, which has now been abandoned; having tried austerity, which was originally a growth policy, not just a necessity, and has since been recognised as having gone too far; and having had the super deduction, which has been and gone, there are no big ideas left on the Conservative side of the House at a time when we really need them.

The first line of the Queen's Speech could, and should, have been: "We will introduce an emergency Budget to offer relief to families and firms struggling with the cost of living crisis." Instead, we have the Prime Minister saying that he is neither in favour of nor against a windfall tax, and the Business Secretary saying that he is ruling it out, but that everything is still on the table; then we have the Prime Minister telling us to expect action on the cost of living soon, and the Treasury telling us to expect action on the cost of living never. The truth is that families and households across this country do not need lessons in budgeting or cookery classes. They need help dealing with challenges that are too big for individuals to have to deal with alone.

All Opposition Members are asking for is action commensurate with the scale of the challenge. That means an emergency Budget with a one-off windfall tax on oil and gas profits to cut household bills; a tax cut for small businesses, saving pubs and shops up to £5,000 this year; and a contingency fund to keep energy-intensive industries competitive, so that for instance we could keep open fertiliser factories that are currently closed, meaning that we would not see further food price inflation into next year because of inaction now. These are real proposals for real action now, because if we wait until October, and if business confidence continues to fall and inflation continues to rise, already hard decisions will become even harder.

What frustrates me is that despite all this, we are a country with such incredible potential. We have an amazing, cutting-edge business sector, with industries up and down the country. As shadow Business Secretary it is a privilege to go and see those firms for myself. In the past few months, I have had the opportunity to see electric cars being manufactured in Sunderland and green hydrogen in Sheffield. I was with a new generation of entrepreneurs at Leeds Business School last week: they were buzzing with ideas and innovations that would boost our economy.

Britain is a great country to work and do business, so why should we accept projections of weak growth and poor productivity, with ever higher taxes as a result? We know how good Britain can be, but over the past 12 years the Conservatives have failed to capture that potential, and future projections are no better. In this debate, several Conservative MPs said that international forces beyond their control, such as global commodity prices or the conflict in Ukraine, were to blame. That claim just does not stand up to scrutiny. Conservatives have been in power for 12 years. Low growth took hold long before the international events that we are concerned about, which is why the Government have had to raise taxes on working people to historic levels. The IMF says that the only country in the G20 that will grow at a slower rate than us is Russia, yet all the Government have to offer is more of the same.

The Opposition are clear that a plan for economic growth must offer good jobs—high-skill, high-wage, secure jobs across the country, jobs that people can raise their family on. Hon. Members rightly raised the absence from the Queen's Speech of the employment Bill, which was a general election promise in 2019 and has since been promised an additional 20 times. What is it about flexible working rights, banning fire and rehire and sorting out sick pay that the Government are so afraid of? I still have not heard from anybody an explanation for why the employment Bill was not included. The treatment of people at P&O Ferries was not just a scandal; it was immoral. As a pro-business, pro-worker party, we stand proud in saying that better employment rights are a key part of our economic plan for Britain.

This country is crying out for a serious plan to break the cycle of low growth, low productivity and high taxes. We have that plan: an industrial strategy built on a partnership between employers and workers; catalytic public investment of £28 billion every year to build the industries and jobs of the future; reform of business taxation to encourage long-term, sustainable growth; increased investment in research and development; and buying, making and selling more in the UK. That is the

[Jonathan Reynolds]

action needed to grow our economy, drive up living standards and fund the public services that this country so desperately needs.

The Queen's Speech just does not meet the moment. We have to ask: if this Government have so little to offer in the face of such tumultuous events, what is the point of this Government? Away from all the bluster and boosterism, the fact is that they have wasted the mandate that they received, and frankly the British people will not forgive them for it. Leadership, vision and optimism are what is required.

The opportunity to present a Queen's Speech is an immense privilege, and the circumstances that we live in made this Queen's Speech a particular responsibility. It required nothing less than short-term relief and hope for the future, but the Government have been unable to provide either. It is clear that this country will not get the Queen's Speech that it really deserves until Labour has the chance to write it.

6.33 pm

**The Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):** It is a pleasure to close this debate on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. I thank right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed; they made many important points, quite rightly holding the Government to account in the best traditions of this House, which made for an excellent debate to follow Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. That speech set out the Government's plans to grow our economy, ease the cost of living and drive our levelling-up agenda.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury set out earlier today the ambitious plans for accelerating economic growth in this country. I echo his comments that there are reasons to be optimistic. Last year the United Kingdom was the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Employment has fallen back to 3.7%, below pre-pandemic levels, the lowest in nearly 50 years—since, I think, before you were even born, Mr Deputy Speaker, assuming that you were not born in 1974. However, as in 1974, inflation is once more on the prowl. It is a global issue, because of wars and rumours of wars, as well as, of course, the covid pandemic. Energy prices have risen globally. Other supply chains are disrupted, and China's biggest cities are in lockdown. Container shipping is in the wrong place in parts of the world. The monetary policy prescriptions that were necessary to deal with the global financial crisis and the pandemic risk of economic inactivity have also taken their toll. All that presents challenges not just to the Government in this country, but to Governments across the world. Fortunately, this Government—Her Majesty's Government—have plans to deal with them.

The areas under my direct responsibility are some crucial, essential, fundamental supply-side reforms in the Brexit freedoms Bill and the Procurement Bill. Those two Bills, along with a host of others in the Queen's Speech covering data reform, gene editing, future transport technology, financial services reform and more, provide exactly the sort of meaningful policy—supply-side reforms that Opposition Members always oppose because their answer is always more regulation and more interference—

which will truly open up the bottlenecks in our economy and give the British people the plenty and prosperity that they deserve. Once again, it is Conservatives who are willing to make proper, long-term, well-thought-through policy decisions to the benefit of the British people.

Before I talk about the Bills in more detail, I want to refer to some of the comments that have been made during today's excellent debate—and what a pleasure to start with the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). Her speech was a beautifully crafted and elegant audition for the leadership of the Labour party, but she has set out her stall, and having always been thought of as being quite moderate—she was, I believe, an economist for the Bank of England at one point—she is now red in tooth and claw. The prescriptions of socialism came spewing forth: higher tax, higher regulation, more spending. The fuel for the inflationary fire was piled up as if she were looking for a veritable bonfire.

The hon. Member for Leeds West was only to be outdone by the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome), who, if the other hon. Lady was Solomon, was Rehoboam. If it was whips from the shadow Chancellor, it was scorpions from the hon. Member for Nottingham East. The scorpions of socialism have lashed this country before, and we will not be stung by their like again. But I must now move on to the very distinguished hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss).

There is a phrase that comes to mind, because the hon. Lady was looking around for something with which to attack this Government, an extraordinary thing for her to do. She found that one item, which was of course the obsession of the Scottish National party, who want to be free from the United Kingdom only to be in thrall to the yoke of Brussels. She found a few pounds that used to come from Brussels but do not come from the United Kingdom, but she forgot the £41 billion that will go from the UK taxpayer to Scotland each year for the next three years; the £170 million from the levelling-up fund for eight Scottish projects; the £52 million to support the establishment of two green freeports; the £42 million for Scottish fisheries and the £1.9 billion for farmers and land managers; and the £1.5 billion for 12 city growth deals. The hon. Lady sat there elegantly straining at a gnat, when camel after camel had been greedily swallowed by the Scottish Government previously.

Let me turn to the inspired and helpful interventions from this side of the House. I am not saying that there is a monopoly of wisdom on this side of the House, although it does sometimes look that way. We started with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), who pointed out that productivity had been a challenge for this economy for some time. He is absolutely right, and that is why supply-side reforms are so important.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) mentioned shale gas. I recall an occasion when a much more distinguished speaker at this Dispatch Box decided that the argument coming from the Back Bench was so strong that he could not rise to answer it and remain within the confines of collective agreement. My more distinguished predecessor was, as it happens, Robert Peel, and the argument was over free trade. Although I was not entirely won over by my right hon. Friend's argument, I am nonetheless glad



that Her Majesty's Government are reviewing the position on shale to ensure that we maximise safely the resources that lie under the feet of the people of this nation.

**Chris Bryant:** Several Members on this side and on the other side spoke today in favour of a windfall tax on windfall profits. As I understand it, the right hon. Gentleman is wholeheartedly opposed to this socialism, so if and when the Government introduce it, will he resign?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Unfortunately, as so often, the hon. Gentleman has not been paying proper attention to the day's debate. If he had, he might have heard an authority greater than I am answering half a dozen questions on that very issue from the Leader of the Opposition slightly earlier. The authority in Her Majesty's Government is obviously the Prime Minister, of whom I am a humble servant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) raised the issue of disruption in supply chains. This is a fundamental problem, and until supply chains are restored, inflation is likely to be difficult. The contributions have ranged widely. We heard from my hon. Friends the Members for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) and for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), as well as from my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Kate Griffiths), whom I was pleased to visit last week. We had the pleasure of going to the Elkes Biscuits factory. If you want a better biscuit, buy Elkes biscuits. They are absolutely delicious. I helped—I was not very good at helping, but I did help—and they sent me home with a packet of Bourbon creams, which have never been devoured faster than they were by my children. I thank my hon. Friend for having me on that visit.

We heard from my hon. Friends the Members for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who insisted that we stick to the title of the debate, which is "Achieving economic growth". He is almost always absolutely right, but on this occasion he was particularly absolutely right. We want to stick to the issue of economic growth. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake).

I do not know whether to be delighted or somewhat miffed at my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson), because in one short speech she made a point that I have been trying to make for about 20 years and she made it more pithily and better than I have ever done. She used a cricketing metaphor, which is that the Government are the groundsmen, and the most they can do is to prepare the pitch for the bowlers and batsmen—the businesses across the country who provide the economic activity. We are not the players in the game; we are the groundsmen. As I say, that is a point that I have been trying to make for a long time, and I am going to steal my hon. Friend's pithy aphorism shamelessly. I hope that I have her permission to do so.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), and also from my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne), who said that growth was everything, agreeing with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough. I

think that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) might need to contact the Boundary Commission, because during his speech he decided to rename his constituency the "Silicon Valley of Europe". For that to be officially approved, I think it would have to go through the proper processes, but it seems to me a jolly good idea that we should have the Silicon Valley of Europe in Milton Keynes, with robots going around showing how modern and technologically sophisticated they are.

I was also delighted by the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). I visited his constituency recently, and he generously provided me with the most excellent cake. Hon. and right hon. Members will think that wherever I go I am provided with confections of the most delicious kind, but that is not compulsory, and I would happily go without the cake to visit Poundbury, which is the most amazing success of planning in providing the things that people want. It is beautiful and elegant, and it achieves a density that other places do not achieve.

I also listened to my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker) with pleasure.

**Geraint Davies:** Will he give way?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** How could I refuse such an eloquently phrased request?

**Geraint Davies:** I am listening to this very amusing after-dinner speech, but does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the serious issue here is that, had we continued on the growth trend of the last Labour Government, people would have an extra £11,000 to work with? We have the highest tax rate since world war two, the highest inflation rate for 40 years and 2.6 million people going to food banks. Does he agree that is a complete catastrophe? He is making a big joke out of it, which shows he should not be in office.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The hon. Gentleman must think there has been a collective outbreak of amnesia not just in the House but across the nation. He seems to forget that the country was bankrupt when the coalition came to office in 2010, and it had been bankrupted by the "spend now, find the money later" approach of the socialists. Was it not Margaret Thatcher who so rightly said that, ultimately, they run out of other people's money? They ran out of other people's money.

Growth has been lower because of the utter irresponsibility of the socialists prior to 2010, and the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury left a little billet-doux, did he not, saying:

"I'm afraid there is no money."

[HON. MEMBERS: "It was 12 years ago."] Yes, it was more than 12 years ago, but we will not let them forget because socialism always leads to economic failure. Every socialist Government there has ever been has led to economic failure, devaluation, high taxes and low economic growth, and then the Conservatives come in to clear things up.

**Andrew Selous:** I have not had the pleasure of visiting Poundbury, but I have visited the Prince of Wales's other development at Nansledan near Newquay, where a wonderful, large doctors surgery is being built. Many

[Andrew Selous]

of us have a serious issue with large new developments, as we do not have quite the same prowess at putting in general practice capacity. When my right hon. Friend is next round the Cabinet table, will he forcefully represent that point, which concerns many of us on both sides of the House?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My hon. Friend is wise, and this is part of the reason why Poundbury has been a success, because it provides basic services, including a primary school. That is part of the planning requirement, so I agree with him very much.

I was delighted by the contribution of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), which are not words I thought I would use nor words he probably thought I would utter. I always thought he was the high priest of remain, yet I could have delivered most of his speech on the intransigence and stick-in-the-mud-iness of the European Union.

I am glad to say that, in the UK, we are being much more flexible. We are recognising that the EU has not suddenly become dangerous. We may not like the EU, we may not think it is the best construct and we may not want to belong to it, but we do not think it has suddenly become rabid. That is why I was delighted to announce in April that the remaining import controls on EU goods will no longer be introduced. This is not a delay but a change in policy, because we recognise that goods produced in other parts of the world—not just the EU—can be produced safely, and it therefore makes sense to have unilateral recognition if others will not give us mutual recognition. Between now and the end of 2023, we will look to see how far we can extend that with other friendly nations that have high standards, as it cuts costs for consumers.

The right hon. Gentleman probably has better relations with highfalutin EU figures than I do, and he may be better placed than I am to persuade them that reciprocity would be more in their interest than ours.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** On open trade, will the Minister give us some clarification on “friendly nations”? Does that include India shipping cheap Indian whisky to the UK?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** This will have to be a risk-based assessment. If the hon. Gentleman can say that this whisky is dangerous or poisonous, or it is breaking a trademark—

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Cheap.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Do we really have a Scotsman in the House who does not like his whisky to be cheap? Does he want to pay higher prices for whisky? Is he calling for this for the good people of Scotland? This is news. This is a newflash, and I hope the PA is reporting it carefully, along with *Hansard*: the SNP wants higher prices for whisky. It wants higher prices for an evening tippie. I look forward to that being a good and successful slogan at the next general election: “Vote SNP for higher whisky prices”.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** How can I refuse the hon. Gentleman?

**David Linden:** Indeed, the Minister cannot. On whisky in India, can he update the House on progress towards reducing the punitive 150% tariff on Scotch whisky, which has an impact on approximately 400 jobs in my constituency?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** This Government are a free-trading Government, which is why we are negotiating around the world to improve access to other markets. That is a very important part of what Her Majesty’s Government are doing.

I wish to mention briefly one of the other things that came up in debate, which was on the issue of public sector fraud.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Before the Minister moves on, will he take the opportunity to welcome from the Dispatch Box the first overseas deal that was cut between Northern Ireland and Australia? Wrightbus, in my constituency, and Volgren, in Australia, are now going to put hydrogen buses on the streets of Australia. That has come directly as a result of our new ability to cut free trade deals.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** That is particularly good news. It is welcome that Northern Ireland, where there are difficulties over the protocol, is seeing genuine benefit from our free trade agreements.

I wish to make a point about fraud, which was an issue raised during the debate. Two years ago, it was of fundamental importance to get money out to businesses quickly. That was the right thing to do and it was supported across the House. It is now right to follow up to make sure that all that money was used honestly, and that if people did not use it honestly, they are subject to proper processes. So £750 million of taxpayers’ money is being committed to following up on fraud. We are setting up a public sector fraud agency and we are working with the banks, who own the loans, to ensure that the bounce back loans are repaid properly and honestly. But it was right to get the money out quickly two years ago and everybody wanted to do it.

**Mr Dhesi:** Does the Minister think it was right for more than £4 billion to already have been written off as unrecoverable fraud? Does he also think that the Minister who resigned at that point in time, on a matter of principle, was wrong to resign?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I would correct the hon. Gentleman, as the money has not been written off. In addition, Lord Agnew has been in touch with me, and I have spoken to him and been seeking his advice on how to ensure that our anti-fraud efforts are as effective as possible. He highlighted the issue very effectively. May I also thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, along with the hon. Members for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) and for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) for theirs? In my humble opinion, they are three of the most sensible and civilised Opposition Members, but I think they decided that the Queen’s Speech was an occasion for them as it is for the heralds: they put on their tabards and their fine show in order to have a theatrical display, rather than to say something

that they normally say, in well-rounded and moderated tones. All three of them went to the wildest fantasies of excessive criticism of the Government.

**Mr Dhesi** *rose*—

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I have already given way once. As I was saying, it was splendid but it was not really what the debate was about. I admire the heralds as well. They are a great addition to the state opening and I hope that the three of them will make this a traditional part of Queen's Speeches in future, being able to over-egg the pudding when it comes in front of them.

I have a feeling that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the many others who are now assembling for the vote may be glad to hear that I am coming to my—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] It is so easy to win cheap popularity. The Government see this post-Brexit world as an historic chance to seize the opportunity for innovation and regulatory reform now that we are free of Brussels diktats. Our future is one of innovation and enterprise, spurred by competition. Following the end of the transition period and the beginning of the UK's new trading relationship with the EU, many businesses have prepared for and adapted to the new environment. It has been a period of change made all the more extraordinary by the need to tackle a global pandemic at the same time.

The cost of business regulation is too high. Too much EU regulation has been written at the expense of consumers and entrepreneurs with new ideas. Many of the EU's regulations—such as Solvency II or the rules on general data protection regulation—benefit big incumbents rather than small competitors and deprive consumers, including Members of the House, of new technologies or better products and services.

Our future is in building on our competitive advantage as a knowledge economy. Our success will be based on the quality of our ideas, on working hard to turn those ideas into new industries, on reforming and enhancing our old ones, and on exporting those ideas. Now that we are outside the EU, we have the opportunity to think boldly, to conceive and implement rules that put the UK first, and to get rid of things—the nonsense, the folderol, the port services directive and such like—that do not help or benefit us.

We are going to have a Brexit freedoms Bill that will make it easier to get rid of bad EU law. It will be deregulatory in principle, remove the supremacy of EU law and ensure that our statute book is one of Scottish, English, Welsh and Northern Irish law, rather than one of EU law. Even the leader of the Scottish National party in Westminster, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), is looking chirpy at the thought of having that degree of control.

Our Procurement Bill will make life easier for small businesses. I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton who said in the debate that small and medium-sized enterprises are the lifeblood of our economic activity. They are the ones that create the jobs, defeat the monopolists and help to bring down prices.

Ultimately, there is a clear choice on this Queen's Speech. It is a choice brought into sharper relief by the inflation that we currently face and a choice faced by previous generations in this House and in this country: do we wish to go down the false path of socialism?

Do we want to follow the hon. Member for Leeds West with higher taxes, higher regulation and wasteful spending? Or do we want freedom and liberty and enterprise? I commend freedom, liberty and enterprise.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 312.*

**Division No. 2]**

**[6.57 pm]**

# **AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Efford, Clive
Abrahams, Debbie	Elliott, Julie
Ali, Tahir	Elmore, Chris
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Eshalomi, Florence
Amesbury, Mike	Evans, Chris
Anderson, Fleur	Farry, Stephen
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Fellows, Marion
Bardell, Hannah	Ferrier, Margaret
Barker, Paula	Fletcher, Colleen
Beckett, rh Margaret	Flynn, Stephen
Begum, Apsana	Fovargue, Yvonne
Benn, rh Hilary	Foxcroft, Vicky
Betts, Mr Clive	Furniss, Gill
Black, Mhairi	Gardiner, Barry
Blackford, rh Ian	Gibson, Patricia
Blackman, Kirsty	Gill, Preet Kaur
Blake, Olivia	Glindon, Mary
Blomfield, Paul	Grant, Peter
Bonnar, Steven	Green, Kate
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Greenwood, Lilian
Brennan, Kevin	Greenwood, Margaret
Brown, Alan	Griffith, Nia
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Gwynne, Andrew
Bryant, Chris	Haigh, Louise
Burgon, Richard	Hamilton, Fabian
Byrne, Ian	Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Byrne, rh Liam	Hanna, Claire
Cadbury, Ruth	Hanvey, Neale
Callaghan, Amy	Hardy, Emma
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Harris, Carolyn
Carden, Dan	Hayes, Helen
Champion, Sarah	Healey, rh John
Chapman, Douglas	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Charalambous, Bambos	Hendry, Drew
Cherry, Joanna	Hillier, Dame Meg
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cowan, Ronnie	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Crawley, Angela	Hollern, Kate
Creasy, Stella	Hosie, rh Stewart
Cruddas, Jon	Howarth, rh Sir George
Cryer, John	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cummins, Judith	Hussain, Imran
Cunningham, Alex	Jarvis, Dan
Daby, Janet	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
David, Wayne	Johnson, Kim
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Darren
Davies-Jones, Alex	Jones, Gerald
Day, Martyn	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
De Cordova, Marsha	Jones, Ruth
Debbonaire, Thangam	Jones, Sarah
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Kane, Mike
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Keeley, Barbara
Dodds, Anneliese	Kendall, Liz
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Khan, Afzal
Doughty, Stephen	Kinnock, Stephen
Dowd, Peter	Kyle, Peter
Duffield, Rosie	Lake, Ben
Eagle, Dame Angela	Lavery, Ian
Eagle, Maria	Law, Chris
Eastwood, Colum	Leadbeater, Kim



Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacAskill, Kenny  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Nicolson, John  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qaisar, Ms Anum  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reed, Steve

Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Alyn  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeter, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Richard  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Winter, Beth  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### **Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Liz Twist and  
 Jessica Morden**

#### **NOES**

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard

Badenoch, Kemi  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, rh Jake  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob

Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Conor  
 Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
 Clarke, Theo  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Donelan, rh Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, rh Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Dunne, rh Philip  
 Eastwood, Mark  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Evannett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark

Fletcher, Nick  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garner, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
 Graham, Richard  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Griffiths, Kate  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkinson, Mark  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian

Kruger, Danny  
 Lamont, John  
 Langan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cherilyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Purslove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob

Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Sharma, rh Alok  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Michael Tomlinson and**  
**Gareth Johnson**

*Amendment proposed:* (m), at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to support unpaid carers despite a Bill having been prepared, fails to tackle issues in SEND education provision and does nothing to ensure pupils affected by the pandemic get extra support to catch up missed education, is not sufficiently ambitious in tackling the cost of living crisis and should include provision for an emergency tax cut cutting the top rate of VAT from 20 per cent to 17.5 per cent; further regret that the Gracious Speech fails to tackle violence against women and girls, nor does it tackle fraud and scams, does nothing to provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees fleeing war and persecution, does nothing to tackle the chronic shortage of dentists and GPs which results in long waiting times for patients requiring essential treatment, ignores the growing waiting times for ambulances, does not reverse the misguided cut to the armed forces of up to 10,000 troops, and fails to restore with immediate effect the 0.7 per cent target of GNI for international development spending.”—(*Ed Davey.*)

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 59, Noes 315.*

### Division No. 3]

[7.13 pm

#### AYES

Bardell, Hannah  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, rh Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Bonnar, Steven  
 Brown, Alan  
 Callaghan, Amy  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 Day, Martyn  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Farron, Tim  
 Farry, Stephen  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Flynn, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Grant, Peter  
 Green, Sarah  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Hanvey, Neale  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hosie, rh Stewart  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Lake, Ben

Law, Chris  
 Linden, David  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 MacAskill, Kenny  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Qaisar, Ms Anum  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Smith, Alyn  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Richard  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wishart, Pete

#### Tellers for the Ayes:

**Mr Alistair Carmichael and**  
**Wendy Chamberlain**

#### NOES

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah

Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Kemi  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon

*Question accordingly negated.*

Beresford, Sir Paul	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Jones, Fay	Poulter, Dr Dan
Berry, rh Jake	Eustice, rh George	Jones, Mr Marcus	Pow, Rebecca
Bhatti, Saqib	Evans, Dr Luke	Jupp, Simon	Pursglove, Tom
Blackman, Bob	Evennett, rh Sir David	Kawczynski, Daniel	Quin, Jeremy
Blunt, Crispin	Everitt, Ben	Kearns, Alicia	Quince, Will
Bone, Mr Peter	Fabricant, Michael	Keegan, Gillian	Randall, Tom
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Farris, Laura	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Redwood, rh John
Bowie, Andrew	Fell, Simon	Knight, Julian	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Bradley, Ben	Fletcher, Katherine	Kruger, Danny	Richards, Nicola
Brady, Sir Graham	Fletcher, Mark	Lamont, John	Richardson, Angela
Braverman, rh Suella	Fletcher, Nick	Largan, Robert	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Brereton, Jack	Ford, Vicky	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Robinson, Mary
Bridgen, Andrew	Foster, Kevin	Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea	Rowley, Lee
Brine, Steve	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Russell, Dean
Bristow, Paul	Frazer, rh Lucy	Levy, Ian	Rutley, David
Britcliffe, Sara	Freeman, George	Lewer, Andrew	Saxby, Selaine
Browne, Anthony	Freer, Mike	Lewis, rh Brandon	Scully, Paul
Bruce, Fiona	French, Mr Louie	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Seely, Bob
Buchan, Felicity	Fuller, Richard	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Selous, Andrew
Buckland, rh Sir Robert	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Loder, Chris	Shannon, Jim
Burghart, Alex	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Logan, Mark	Sharma, rh Alok
Burns, rh Conor	Garnier, Mark	Longhi, Marco	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Butler, Rob	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Lopez, Julia	Simmonds, David
Cairns, rh Alun	Gibb, rh Nick	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Skidmore, rh Chris
Carter, Andy	Gideon, Jo	Loughton, Tim	Smith, Chloe
Cartlidge, James	Goodwill, rh Sir Robert	Mackinlay, Craig	Smith, Greg
Cash, Sir William	Graham, Richard	Mackrory, Cherilyn	Smith, Henry
Cates, Miriam	Gray, James	Maclean, Rachel	Smith, rh Julian
Caulfield, Maria	Grayling, rh Chris	Mak, Alan	Smith, Royston
Chalk, Alex	Green, Chris	Malthouse, rh Kit	Solloway, Amanda
Chishti, Rehman	Green, rh Damian	Mangnall, Anthony	Spencer, Dr Ben
Chope, Sir Christopher	Griffith, Andrew	Mann, Scott	Stafford, Alexander
Churchill, Jo	Griffiths, Kate	Marson, Julie	Stephenson, Andrew
Clark, rh Greg	Grundy, James	Mayhew, Jerome	Stevenson, Jane
Clarke, rh Mr Simon	Gullis, Jonathan	Maynard, Paul	Stevenson, John
Clarke, Theo	Halfon, rh Robert	McCartney, Jason	Streeter, Sir Gary
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Hall, Luke	McCartney, Karl	Stride, rh Mel
Clarkson, Chris	Hammond, Stephen	McPartland, Stephen	Stuart, Graham
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Hands, rh Greg	McVey, rh Esther	Sturdy, Julian
Colburn, Elliot	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Menzies, Mark	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Costa, Alberto	Harris, Rebecca	Merriman, Huw	Syms, Sir Robert
Courts, Robert	Harrison, Trudy	Metcalfe, Stephen	Thomas, Derek
Coutinho, Claire	Hart, Sally-Ann	Millar, Robin	Throup, Maggie
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Hart, rh Simon	Mills, Nigel	Timpson, Edward
Crosbie, Virginia	Hayes, rh Sir John	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Tolhurst, Kelly
Crouch, Tracey	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Tomlinson, Justin ( <i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Christopher Pincher</i> )
Daly, James	Heappey, James	Moore, Damien	Tracey, Craig
Davies, Dr James	Heaton-Harris, rh Chris	Moore, Robbie	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Davies, Mims	Henderson, Gordon	Morris, Anne Marie	Trott, Laura
Davies, Philip	Henry, Darren	Morris, David	Tugendhat, Tom
Davis, rh Mr David	Higginbotham, Antony	Morris, James	Vara, Shailesh
Davison, Dehenna	Hinds, rh Damian	Morrissey, Joy	Vickers, Martin
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Hoare, Simon	Mortimer, Jill	Vickers, Matt
Dines, Miss Sarah	Holden, Mr Richard	Mullan, Dr Kieran	Villiers, rh Theresa
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mundell, rh David	Walker, Sir Charles
Docherty, Leo	Holloway, Adam	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Walker, Mr Robin
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Holmes, Paul	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Donelan, rh Michelle	Howell, Paul	Neill, Sir Robert	Wallis, Dr Jamie
Double, Steve	Huddleston, Nigel	Nici, Lia	Warman, Matt
Dowden, rh Oliver	Hudson, Dr Neil	Nokes, rh Caroline	Watling, Giles
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hunt, Jane	Norman, rh Jesse	Webb, Suzanne
Drax, Richard	Hunt, rh Jeremy	O'Brien, Neil	Whately, Helen
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hunt, Tom	Offord, Dr Matthew	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Duddridge, James	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Opperman, Guy	Whittaker, Craig
Duguid, David	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Paisley, Ian	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Patel, rh Priti	Wiggin, Sir Bill
Dunne, rh Philip	Jenkinson, Mark	Pawsey, Mark	Wild, James
Eastwood, Mark	Jenkyns, Andrea	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Williams, Craig
Edwards, Ruth	Jenrick, rh Robert	Penrose, John	Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Ellis, rh Michael	Johnston, David	Percy, Andrew	Wood, Mike
	Jones, Andrew	Philp, Chris	Wragg, Mr William
	Jones, rh Mr David	Pincher, rh Christopher	



Wright, rh Jeremy  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Michael Tomlinson and**  
**Gareth Johnson**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Amendment proposed: (s), at the end of the Question to add:*

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to include bills that protect workers’ rights, tackle the cost of living crisis, or the climate emergency; further regret that the Gracious Speech does not contain provision to uplift benefits and implement a windfall tax on companies which are benefiting from significantly increased profits as a result of impacts associated with the pandemic or the current international situation; and reject the proposals both for a Brexit Freedoms Bill, which will undermine devolution, and the Bill of Rights, which will weaken human rights protections.”—(*Ian Blackford.*)

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 59, Noes 313.*

**Division No. 4]**

**[7.24 pm**

# **AYES**

Bardell, Hannah  
Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Bonnar, Steven  
Brown, Alan  
Callaghan, Amy  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Chapman, Douglas  
Cherry, Joanna  
Cooper, Daisy  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Crawley, Angela  
Davey, rh Ed  
Day, Martyn  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Eastwood, Colum  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Ferrier, Margaret  
Flynn, Stephen  
Gibson, Patricia  
Grant, Peter  
Green, Sarah  
Hanna, Claire  
Hanvey, Neale  
Hendry, Drew  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hosie, rh Stewart  
Jardine, Christine

Lake, Ben  
Law, Chris  
Linden, David  
Lucas, Caroline  
MacAskill, Kenny  
Mc Nally, John  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonald, Stuart C.  
McLaughlin, Anne  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moran, Layla  
Morgan, Helen  
Newlands, Gavin  
Nicolson, John  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Olney, Sarah  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Qaisar, Ms Anum  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Smith, Alyn  
Stephens, Chris  
Thewliss, Alison  
Thompson, Owen  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Wilson, Munira  
Wishart, Pete

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Marion Fellows and**  
**Richard Thomson**

# **NOES**

Adams, rh Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Bailey, Shaun  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Baron, Mr John  
Baynes, Simon  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, rh Jake

Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Burns, rh Conor  
Butler, Rob  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke, Theo  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Coutinho, Claire  
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Dr James  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Dunne, rh Philip  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David

Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Fell, Simon  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Ford, Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gideon, Jo  
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
Graham, Richard  
Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Griffiths, Kate  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Holden, Mr Richard  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holmes, Paul  
Howell, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnston, David  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lamont, John  
 Largan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cheryllyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher

Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, rh Alok  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin (*Proxy vote cast by Christopher Pincher*)  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William

Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Michael Tomlinson and  
 Gareth Johnson

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Main question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 229.*

## Division No. 5]

[7.35 pm

### AYES

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Kemi  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, rh Jake  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bristow, Paul  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Conor  
 Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
 Clarke, Theo  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, rh Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, rh Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Dunne, rh Philip  
 Eastwood, Mark  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garner, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
 Graham, Richard  
 Gray, James

Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Griffiths, Kate  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkinson, Mark  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lamont, John  
 Langan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cherilyn

Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, rh Alok  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian

Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Christopher Pincher*)  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt

Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Gareth Johnson and**  
**Michael Tomlinson**

#### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Barker, Paula  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, rh Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Bonnar, Steven  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brown, Alan  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Callaghan, Amy  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Carden, Dan  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Chamberlain, Wendy  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex  
 Daby, Janet  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farron, Tim  
 Farry, Stephen  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flynn, Stephen  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Grant, Peter  
 Green, Kate  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise



Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Hanvey, Neale  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hosie, rh Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacAskill, Kenny  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nandy, Lisa

Newlands, Gavin  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Nicolson, John  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qaisar, Ms Anum  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reed, Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Alyn  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeter, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thompson, Richard  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Winter, Beth  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Jessica Morden and  
 Liz Twist

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which was addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

*Address to be presented to Her Majesty by Members of the House who are Privy Counsellors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

#### INCOME TAX

That the draft Alternative Finance (Income Tax, Capital Gains Tax and Corporation Tax) Order 2022, which was laid before this House on 28 March in the last session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Scott Mann.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### PETITIONS

#### Doncaster bid for Great British Railways headquarters

7.46 pm

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): I submit this petition on behalf of the good people of Don Valley, Doncaster and the wider community, who believe—as I do—that the rightful home of the new Great British Railways headquarters is Doncaster. With its rich heritage, fantastic transport links, a bedrock of businesses to build on, huge support from the whole community and the fact that it will help fulfil the Government's levelling-up agenda, there really is no other place.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the nomination of Doncaster to house the new headquarters of Great British Railways.

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

*Declares that the new Great British Railways headquarters should be located in the railway town of Doncaster; notes that Doncaster is where the Mallard and Flying Scotsman were built, highlighting its rich railway heritage; further that Doncaster is located on the main line; and further that Doncaster has a great history and great people who will benefit from the creation of a new Great British Railways headquarters in their town.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the nomination of Doncaster to house the new headquarters of Great British Railways.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

### Carnforth bid for Great British Railways headquarters

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): My petition is similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher). However, we have 1,500—and rising—petitioners from among the people of Carnforth and the surrounding area. I am really glad and honoured that my friend, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), whose constituency is next-door to mine, is here to support this petition. Without further ado, this is good for us and it shows that democracy is alive and well, because we have had nearly a third of the people return the petition.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that Carnforth would be an ideal location for the new headquarters of Great British Railways; further that the creation of the headquarters would bring additional jobs to the community, as well as encourage new investment; and further over 1,500 members of the community have signalled their interest to the Secretary of State for Transport via a letter writing campaign.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the nomination of Carnforth to house the new headquarters of Great British Railways.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002733]

### UK Songwriters and Composers

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

7.48 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and my membership of the Musicians' Union and the Ivors Academy. I also take this opportunity to announce to the House that I was elected as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on music earlier today. I look forward very much to using that platform to campaign further for our great musicians and music industry.

I am delighted to have this opportunity, ahead of the 67th annual Ivor Novello awards tomorrow, to pay tribute to our world-renowned songwriters and composers. Hon. Members may have seen early-day motion 35, which I tabled this week to celebrate Ivors Week and the work of the Ivors Academy:

“That this House notes that 16 to 20 May 2022 is Ivors Week, and joins the Ivors Academy in celebrating this country's world-leading songwriters and composers, culminating in the Ivor Novello Awards which honour the best in British and Irish songwriting and composing; further notes that the success of the UK music industry is founded upon the talent and creativity of world-leading composers and lyricists; and calls on the UK music industry and the Government to ensure that a business and public policy framework exists to nurture future songwriting talent and to properly reward those whose creativity helps generate the £5.2 billion annual economic contribution that music makes to UK plc as well as furnishing people with the soundtracks of their lives.”

May I take this opportunity to thank all our songwriters and composers? I also thank the Ivors Academy's chief executive Graham Davies, its chair Tom Gray, its former chair Crispin Hunt and all its members for their work championing our great songwriters and composers. I pay tribute to the chair of the Ivors Academy Trust, Cliff Fluet, whose work helps to support, educate and nurture the songwriters, composers and creators who need it most. The Ivors Academy is using this Ivors Week of celebration to launch TheWRD, a new further education diploma in creative entrepreneurship, to offer career-defining arts education, widen opportunity for young people and open access to a career in music and the creative industries.

I also want to highlight Credits Due, the Ivors Academy's excellent joint initiative with the Music Rights Awareness Foundation, and give a mention to songwriter Fiona Bevan, who is helping to promote it. Its purpose is to increase knowledge of music rights through education and other forms of support. It can go some way towards recovering some of the estimated £500 million of annual missing income that is not paid to songwriters from global streaming revenues because of inaccurate or incomplete metadata attached to recordings.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, in these debates I always emphasise creativity's value in and of itself, not just its economic value. We all understand that music is inherently good for us. Whether we sing tunelessly in the shower, belt out a chant at the football or tap our foot to the radio, music is our common human therapy.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for all he does for the music business. I congratulate him on being elected chair of the APPG—

[*Jim Shannon*]

there is no better person than him for it. Does he agree that each region of this wondrous United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has so much to offer in cultural expression? Does he know that there are members of the world-class Ulster Orchestra who began their long learning journey in Orange halls across the Province of Northern Ireland? Together, all these cultural expressions make a wonderful musical symphony that makes us all very proud to be British.

**Kevin Brennan:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is quite a keen musician himself. I agree that music is incredibly important in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—all the countries of our United Kingdom. I also completely agree that music can bring people together in harmony. We should remember that power at all times.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): I declare an interest similar to the hon. Gentleman's. Is he aware that the views that he is expressing are not unique to the Opposition, because many Government Members share his appreciation for composers and his passion for music?

**Kevin Brennan:** Yes, I am, not least because I have written a couple of songs with the right hon. Gentleman that we have recorded down the years with our band MP4—legends in our own imagination. As we say in these groups, he is not only a drummer, but a musician: he has written songs himself, some of which have cult status on the internet.

UK Music's recent "Power of Music" report sets out in clear terms the enormous and extensive benefits that music provides for health and wellbeing, with notable effectiveness in regulating and improving the mental health of so many people during the pandemic and in offering particular emotional respite for those with dementia. What is beneficial is not just playing and singing, but creating music. Organisations such as the Songwriting Charity empower young people and communities through the art and craft of songwriting to boost their confidence, self-esteem and mental health.

Some Members may not be aware—although you may be, Mr Deputy Speaker, given your origins—that Ivor Novello, the Welsh songwriter, playwright, composer and actor, was born on Cowbridge Road East in my constituency in 1893. Christened David Ivor Davies, he took the name Novello from his mother, Clara Novello Davies. I was particularly pleased when, three years ago, the former British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors—BASCA—rebranded itself as the Ivors Academy in his memory, and in acknowledgment of the world-famous Ivor Novello Awards, which it runs.

In economic terms, songwriters and composers contribute substantially to the value of our music, performing and visual arts ecosystem, which generates an enormous £10 billion domestically, with music exports constituting £2.9 billion in value to the UK economy. UK Music points out that one in 10 songs streamed globally were produced here in the UK. That is a lot of globally popular UK songs and music.

This past week—and I know that you were watching, Mr Deputy Speaker—exemplified the joy and excitement that songs can create, with the immense talents of a

diverse range of musicians and composers from across Europe and beyond brought under the Eurovision roof in Turin. Congratulations, of course, to Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra, the deserved winners on the night, but also to the UK's Sam Ryder, who came second. Writing great songs is a Great British tradition, from Ivor Novello's "Keep the Home Fires Burning", through Lennon and McCartney's "I Want To Hold Your Hand", David Bowie's "Life on Mars" and Joan Armatrading's "Love and Affection", to Adele and Dan Wilson's "Someone Like You"; but we must not take it for granted that that will go on forever.

I am happy to inform those who are not aware of it that the UK's Eurovision song, "Space Man", was co-written by the incredibly talented former student of Cardiff's Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and Radio Wales presenter, Amy Wadge. Many had assumed that Britain's recent lack of success in Eurovision was political, but it turns out that what is needed—as well as a talented artist, good presentation and good production—is, above all, a great song. I am old enough to recall a time when Eurovision was known as the Eurovision Song Contest, and the writers were featured on camera to take a bow for their part in the creation of the music. There is no singer without the song and no song without songwriters, so perhaps that recognition should be resurrected. When I was growing up with vinyl records, which are now popular again, I used to study the labels intently to see who had written the songs. I want people to do that again, so that the art of songwriting is once again given its proper due rather than being hidden away somewhere deep in the metadata.

**Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is a great champion for the music industry, and he has done much to secure a better deal for musicians, particularly from music streaming. He has also worked with the former chair of the Ivors Academy, Crispin Hunt. It is true that we need great songwriters, but we must ensure that they receive a fair share from the music that they have written and performed. I should like to know what more we can do, on both sides of the House, to ensure that musicians receive that better payment.

**Kevin Brennan:** The right hon. Lady is absolutely right. She has been a tremendous advocate on behalf of songwriters and composers, and although we sit on opposite sides of the House and may differ on many subjects, this is a subject on which she has been a passionate advocate for creators to get their just rewards. Later in my speech I will refer to some of the issues that she has mentioned, all of which featured in the private Member's Bill of which she was a sponsor and which I introduced in the last Session. Ongoing work on parts of the Bill will, I hope, bear fruit in the near future.

We need to improve the wealth of research and development opportunities available to British creatives. Talent pipelines have been left to fracture and decay over the last decade, with cuts in education and local authorities' services under consecutive Conservative Governments. It is vital that meaningful opportunities exist for the songwriters and composers of the future from all backgrounds, regardless of their genre and of their means and connections. This must be a key test for the DCMS, and particularly for the Secretary of State in the context of her professed desire to level up in her role.



I draw the House's attention to this week's very welcome announcement from the Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff of the trebling of funding for music education and the launch of Wales's new national music service, which will ensure that all pupils between three and 16 years of age can access and borrow musical instruments through a national instrument library. It will also expand creative opportunities to pupils of all backgrounds through the offer of half a term's tuition for free.

The challenge for UK Government Ministers is clear. In a survey conducted on behalf of the Ivors Academy's TheWRD—the further education diploma that I mentioned earlier—it was found that:

“70% felt that starting a career in music would be difficult, citing barriers such as not having contacts, being too much of a financial risk, lack of opportunities, and the industry not being open to people from their background. When asked about the barriers young people faced in accessing further education, almost 50% of those surveyed felt they were unable to afford it, and 1 in 4 said they do not have access to courses near where they live.”

I hope that the Government will follow the Welsh Government's initiative when they review their national music plan, and also that they will support the Ivors Academy's TheWRD initiative that was announced this week.

At this point, I remind the House of the vital role that our public institutions play in nurturing songwriting talent. The BBC sometimes comes under criticism in this House, but I remind hon. Members of the vital role that it plays in underpinning, promoting and paying our musicians, songwriters and composers. BBC Introducing is an excellent example of research and development from our national public service broadcaster. It has supported almost 300,000 artists on its platform and gone on to achieve 23 UK No. 1 hit singles and 146 Brit award nominations. Every day, music is playing somewhere on the BBC. When music is playing, musicians should be getting paid. On the BBC, they are. It is generating royalties for musicians, songwriters and composers. There is, I am afraid, an increasing trend in the new digital media to try to avoid paying composers, and insisting on taking from them what Parliament intended they should have—that is, royalties when their music is used. The BBC has been a helpful bulwark against that trend, and changes in the way in which programmes are now commissioned at arm's length must not be used to deny composers their full remuneration.

There has rightly been a lot of coverage recently of the cost of living crisis, and sadly, for too many talented and successful musicians, songwriters and composers, getting by on their meagre royalties has been a struggle for years. When we held our Select Committee inquiry, one of our witnesses was a Mercury prize-nominated artist who was struggling to pay their rent because of problems resulting from the pandemic and the lack of reward from streaming.

The Minister will recall that a major provision in my private Member's Bill, which was sponsored by Members in the House and introduced in the last Session, placed a transparency obligation on those who have had rights transferred or licensed to them, requiring them to supply timely and comprehensive information to the songwriter, composer or artist about where and how their music is being played, so that they can be sure that they are being paid what they are due. The Select Committee

recommended this after hearing evidence during its inquiry into the economics of music streaming, which found that it is often difficult for artists and songwriters to gain any clarity or to audit their works. We heard about money that should have been paid disappearing into what are known in the industry as black boxes. It is clear that songwriters suffer particularly because of poor data standards.

On the subject of the value of streaming to songwriters, the Committee expressed concern about how the big three record labels also own large parts of the music publishing business, and about how that might influence the way in which revenue from streaming is distributed. If the big three make more profit from their rights in the recording than they do from their rights in the publishing, there is a disincentive for them to pay songwriters a competitive share of the streaming revenue. The publishing right ought to be competing for more value against the recording, but it appears to be stifled by that problem of joint ownership. I praised the Government at the time for noting the concerns, expressed in the Committee's report, about the impact of monopoly power and cross-ownership in the music industry and for referring the matter to the Competition and Markets Authority for a study of potential market failure. I keenly await its conclusions.

The issue of streaming remuneration has not gone away. There is a real danger, particularly in the current economic context, that we will make no progress on recovering the artists lost to the industry during the pandemic if more is not done to support our songwriters and composers. Last November's survey by the Help Musicians charity found that 80% of professional musicians had been unable to return to full-time work since the pandemic struck.

The live industry, as one of the sectors forced to shut for the longest period during multiple lockdowns, has also faced an uphill battle in its recovery from the pandemic. The VAT reduction on ticket sales introduced in July 2020 was a vital lifeline for struggling venues and events across the country, and it recognised the sector's high up-front costs and significant preparatory time. Abandoning the reduction too soon prevented a further £765 million of investment over a three-year period and held back the sector's post-pandemic recovery. These are the venues and events upon which the creative ecosystem relies. Songwriters get paid by PRS for Music when their compositions are played live, so I ask the Minister to use this Ivors Week to remember that the vibrancy and success of the UK's music industry are built on the creative activities of songwriters and composers, and that it is not achieved in a vacuum. The pandemic compounded the everyday struggles of our talented artists and exposed the cracks in the industry's infrastructure.

In classrooms, music venues, festivals and, of course, the money that musicians should be paid, the need for reform and investment is evident. A career in music can be viable, but there is work to be done to ensure that those who have the talent, from whatever background, have a chance at success.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I was privileged to go to the Royal Academy of Music a couple of times recently. I saw some of the composers and songwriters there, so I know the next generation of songwriters and composers will do us proud.

8.7 pm

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) for securing this debate and for superbly highlighting the enduring talent and ingenuity of Britain's songwriters and composers, the value of their creativity in and of itself, and the cultural and economic capital they generate for our nation. I also congratulate him on his election to be the new chair of the all-party parliamentary group on music.

I am also grateful to the hon. Gentleman for highlighting the incredible night on Saturday, when we had the most perfect result we might have hoped for at Eurovision. I congratulate Sam Ryder on his performance and on restoring our reputation for Eurovision mightiness.

If the hon. Gentleman has noticed a modest uptick in his Spotify stats this week, it is because I researched this debate to the mournful strums of "The Wrecker of Wick" and "The Clown & The Cigarette Girl," two of his great contributions to the British catalogue of compositions. Should his bandmate, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), one day retire, I stand ready to dust off my drumsticks to fill the gap in his magnificent band, MP3/MP4.

From the Beatles to Kate Bush, and from Ed Sheeran to Sam Ryder, the work of UK songwriters and composers is a prized national asset that resonates with audiences all over the world, giving us tremendous soft power globally. I suspect we will shortly see that talent showcased at the platinum jubilee concert. Their skills are vital not only to the music industry but to the creative industries as a whole, including advertising, film and television. The hon. Gentleman cited the role of the BBC, and I recently met its head of pop music to discuss how the BBC nurtures creative talent.

I also thank the hon. Gentleman for highlighting the importance of music, musicians and composers to wellbeing during the pandemic, when many people found solace in music. At this juncture, I would like to thank an important charity in my constituency, Singing for the Brain, which does fantastic musical work with dementia sufferers.

As the hon. Gentleman highlighted, Monday marked the start of Ivors Week, a celebration of UK songwriters and composers hosted by the Ivors Academy. I am very excited to attend the Ivor Novello awards tomorrow alongside the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I was pleased to hear about the Ivors Academy's new diploma. That ceremony will place a spotlight on the economic value of music to the UK economy. As UK Music has calculated, the sector employs more people than the steel and fishery industries combined. However, it does face challenges, partly as a result of the pandemic and because of how technology is changing the economic model in the sector.

The hon. Gentleman has been a powerful voice in this House about the ways in which the rise of digital technology is bringing about dramatic changes to the UK music landscape. The advent of streaming has undoubtedly revolutionised the way in which we consume and engage with music, but it has also had a profound impact on the industry. That shift has significantly altered how creators earn an income, as royalties from streaming largely replace music sales as the dominant source of that income. That shift has called into question

the business models operated by platforms. I am aware that campaigns such as #brokenrecord, which is led by the Ivors Academy and the Musicians' Union, highlight concerns about the distribution of streaming royalties. The Government want the UK music industry, including songwriters and composers, to be able to flourish in the digital age. In response to concerns raised by his Committee, the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in its inquiry on streaming, we are undertaking a wide-ranging programme of work to delve into the evidence and find solutions to the issues highlighted by the inquiry.

I have recently met key stakeholders, such as the British Phonographic Industry, UK Music and Warner Music Group, to discuss the music streaming debate and how creators can be further supported. The Secretary of State has also engaged closely on these issues. The major record labels play an important role in helping artists, including emerging talent, so that they can connect with audiences and thrive in the streaming era. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, they have now each announced that they will disregard unrecovered advances from pre-2000 contracts and pay more to more artists for streaming, which was one of the recommendations from the Select Committee's inquiry. I know that that was greeted positively by artist representatives.

We think that those kinds of industry initiatives are a step in the right direction to make sure that the streaming market is fairer, but we are looking at what else we can do and whether further action will be necessary. Similarly, although we agree with many of the issues raised by the Committee in its inquiry, we want to ensure that any action is based on the best available evidence. The Minister for science, research and innovation, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), and I have written to the Select Committee this week with an update on the work under way. In advance of the hon. Gentleman receiving that letter, let me update him by saying that the Intellectual Property Office is now working alongside industry experts to develop solutions to issues around contract transparency and music metadata, one of the issues he highlighted today. That will have an impact on the way in which songwriters and composers are remunerated for their work on streaming. We have also commissioned independent research on the impact of potential legislative interventions aimed at improving creator remuneration.

The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation is progressing work on the effects of algorithms on music consumption and the potential impacts on music creators. It is also exploring how streaming services can better communicate with creators and mitigate against potential harms for those groups. The hon. Gentleman cited the Competition and Markets Authority. It is undertaking a market study into music streaming, which will add value to and complement the Government's programme of work, and could help inform any future intervention. That CMA market study was launched in January 2022, as he will know. An update is due in July, with the study scheduled to conclude in January 2023. We are encouraged by the progress of the programme of work so far, with industry stakeholders engaging constructively and taking the issues seriously.

Another key income stream for our composers and musicians comes from live music. As the hon. Gentleman highlighted, the live music scene is undergoing a period

of recovery, in the wake of a very difficult experience during the pandemic, and we are working hard to support it. I am glad to reflect on where we stand today compared with the grim situation that faced us over the Christmas period with omicron, when the team and I were talking through the needs of the live music sector in emergency support meetings. I am glad that some of the worst fears highlighted at that time have not come to pass and that we have been able to open up the economy, which has been crucial in getting that income flowing into venues again. But we also want to build on existing schemes to continue to support the live music sector. Since the national lottery project grant's "Supporting Grassroots Live Music" scheme launched in 2019, the Arts Council has made 253 awards, and invested £4.7million in venues and promoters through that fund. That has supported everything from upgrading equipment and offering free rehearsal spaces and mentoring, to refurbishing bathrooms and staging family-friendly gigs. That is separate to a lot of the support that we put in during the pandemic and via the cultural recovery fund. I am pleased to say that the Arts Council has confirmed that the fund has been extended until 31 March 2023. That will, thanks to national lottery players, provide a £1.5 million ringfenced fund that will support the grassroots live music sector.

Not only are we seeing domestic recovery from the pandemic, but we are a major presence on the international music scene. We are the largest exporter of music in the world after the USA, with around one in 10 of all tracks streamed globally being by a British artist. That is incredible. The sector's high export capacity and its ability to access international audiences will continue to elevate the UK on the global stage, forge new international relationships and enable us to promote British values around the world.

Alongside the work I have outlined, we continue to provide export support for the UK's creative industries through a range of export-support programmes, including the international showcase fund and the successful music export growth scheme, which provides grants to music companies to help them with marketing campaigns when they look to introduce successful UK music projects overseas.

We are looking at what more we can do as part of the wider creative sector vision—to be published in the summer—on support for UK creative talent. As part of that sector vision, we are working with the industry to build a more resilient workforce, and we have co-funded research from the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre to look into the job quality and working practices of the creative industries. That will help us to better understand some of the really tricky issues that affect the workforce in the creative sector, including in respect of freelancers and creators, and particularly when it comes to job security, remuneration, professional development and wellbeing. As I say, the sector vision is due to be published this summer. We hope to use the document as the basis of a longer-term strategy that takes us up to 2030.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about investing in the future of music makers to make sure that our music success story continues. We want to make sure that all young people engage with music, and we plan to do so through the implementation of a national plan for music education. The NPME strategy sets out our vision for all children and young people to learn to sing, play an instrument and create music together, and to have the opportunity to progress their musical interests and talents, including professionally. We are confident that such initiatives will help to provide the next generation of aspiring creators with the tools and knowledge they need to achieve their full potential. I hope to make further announcements on the subject when we have finished that piece of work.

I think everyone present would agree that the work of songwriters and composers is not only crucial to the success of our music industry but hugely beneficial to the UK's culture and economy. That is why we will continue to work alongside the industry to seek solutions and make a tangible difference. We will also continue to celebrate and commend the work of UK songwriters and composers. I wish the Ivors Academy and every participant in the awards tomorrow the very best of luck.

*Question put and agreed to.*

8.17 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Written Statements

Wednesday 18 May 2022

## DEFENCE

### Defence and Security Industrial Strategy

#### **The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin):**

I wish to update Parliament on the progress made since the publication of the defence and security industrial strategy (DSIS) on 23 March 2021.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted even more the importance of a sustainable and resilient sector that generates the necessary skills to deliver the capabilities we and our partners need, now and in the future.

Over the past 12 months, Government and industry have made significant progress on more than 50 DSIS commitments, and today, I am pleased to announce the publication of the land industrial strategy (LIS) which will be published on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website shortly. I am also placing a copy in the Library of the House.

#### *The Land Industrial Strategy*

The LIS draws on DSIS principles to provide, for the first time, a specific strategy for the sector. It sets the conditions for a long-term collaborative approach, based on shared culture and behaviours that support co-investment in capability delivery, innovation, the strengthening of supply chains and the national industrial resilience the UK needs to respond to crisis.

The LIS is not intended to prevent MOD looking overseas to acquire where appropriate the best value for money equipment. It is however designed to encourage greater transparency and partnerships, especially with onshore suppliers.

The LIS should support the delivery of modernised equipment to the frontline more quickly and efficiently. Key platforms will serve for decades, so we will use open architectures, commonality and modularity, and work with industry to make upgrades through-life. This will give us enhanced capabilities and decisive advantage against adversaries, and, with our allies, the critical "technological edge" needed in this information age.

#### *Partnerships*

In the coming years, Government will be asking more of industry, to become more efficient and more enterprising, ensuring we have access to the skills and capabilities we need. This is why we are offering greater long-term transparency on our plans and policies. Since DSIS, MOD has published strategies for digital, data, shipbuilding, space and now land. Other documents such as the defence artificial intelligence strategy will be published shortly.

In addition, we are now going beyond the commitments set out a year ago and, building on the principles of DSIS, we will soon be publishing a defence capability framework that will articulate our longer-term military capability priorities and challenges, providing greater transparency of our future plans and building upon the

equipment plan 21. It will map out those areas where we expect industry to invest and upskill, combining our collective efforts to achieve the best outcomes for the UK.

In January, in recognition of the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for innovation, diversity, and resilience in MOD's supply chains, we published the refreshed SME action plan, which sets out how MOD will continue to create opportunities for SMEs.

I will shortly be launching the defence technology exploitation programme (DTEP)—a UK-wide initiative that will fund and support collaborative projects between SMEs and higher tier defence suppliers—and help them win new business delivering against MOD's technological priorities.

DSIS also focuses on strengthening our partnerships abroad including through developing our Government-to-Government frameworks to better support defence exports.

#### *Acquisition and Procurement Reform*

Closer to home, we are driving increased pace into acquisition and incentivising innovation and productivity through a range of acquisition improvement initiatives and fundamental reforms of the regulations that govern defence and security procurement and single source contracts.

The implementation of category management is expected to result in financial savings and capability benefits such as improved availability and time to delivery, through a pan-Defence approach to buying goods and services.

We are improving the way that we manage our senior responsible owner (SRO) cadre by introducing an SRO talent pool and ensuring that our SRO skills are matched to the challenges of the projects. We are also targeting the SROs on our biggest projects allocating at least 50% of their time to the task.

We have implemented the social value model within MOD's procurement process, ensuring contracts deliver against key MOD outcomes and also support wider Government objectives. The MOD's social value centre of expertise has been established and is ensuring this model is consistently applied.

In March, the Joint Economic Data Hub published its first annual report, highlighting the important role the defence sector makes to the UK economy, including the large number of defence jobs supported by international business as well as the many apprentices and graduates in the sector. This is part of the drive by Defence to be more transparent in setting out the economic contribution the defence sector makes across the UK.

#### *Innovation*

This Government have reversed the long-term decline in research and development through additional funding and our ringfenced investment of at least £6.6 billion over the four years of the 2020 spending review. We have increased funding to the UK Defence Solutions Centre and the Defence and Security Accelerator, which is helping turn private sector innovation into military capability.

In February, the UK's first defence space strategy included a commitment to invest a further £1.4 billion into space technologies over the next decade—with additional innovation funding since being provided;

and in March, I opened the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory's first regional S&T hub in Newcastle upon Tyne, focusing on AI and data science to exploit the latest technological breakthroughs for use across Defence.

We are also working closely across Government with the Joint Security and Resilience Centre at the Home Office and UK Defence and Security Exports at the Department for International Trade to create a more resilient, more efficient, and more innovative security sector.

#### *Conclusion*

We have made significant progress in the first year of DSIS, but there is more to be done. The Defence Secretary and I, supported by other Government Ministers, will continue to review progress against commitments to make sure our armed forces will continue to get the equipment and capabilities they need to keep us safe and drive prosperity.

Attachments can be viewed online at:  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2022-05-18/HCWS36/>

[HCWS36]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### **Fire Reform White Paper and Improving Fire Safety for the Public**

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):**  
 My noble Friend the Minister of State, Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lord Greenhalgh) has today made the following written ministerial statement:

I am pleased to make a number of announcements to the House today that set out both the Government's fire reform agenda and the introduction of a package of fire safety measures that will protect the public for years to come. Taken together, this is about:

Driving forward reform of the fire and rescue service by launching the Fire Reform White Paper and consultation (CP 670)

Implementing a package of measures to improve fire safety  
 Improving transparency and engaging the public.

#### *Fire Reform White Paper and consultation*

The Fire Reform White Paper and consultation seeks to introduce system-wide reform to strengthen fire and rescue services across England. The proposals are set out under three key themes: people; professionalism; and governance. The consultation is launching today to seek views and will be open for 10 weeks.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

#### *Review of the National Joint Council*

As set out in the White Paper the Government will launch a review of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services. The review, which will commence later this year, will consider whether the pay negotiation mechanism in England is fit for purpose.

#### *The Fire Safety Act 2021*

The Fire Safety Act 2021 was commenced in full on 16 May 2022. This will clarify that structure, external walls and flat entrance doors of blocks of flats are within scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the fire safety order) and ensure that they are included in that building's fire risk assessment.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-act-2021>

#### *Fire risk assessment prioritisation tool*

To support commencement of the Fire Safety Act 2021, the Home Office is publishing supporting guidance issued under article 50 of the fire safety order and launching an online prioritisation tool. The new fire risk assessment prioritisation tool has been developed to help responsible persons identify the priority for updating fire risk assessments.

Fire risk assessment prioritisation tool:

<https://bpt.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

#### *Fire Safety (Regulations) 2022*

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 will require responsible persons to send information on high-rise residential buildings which will help fire and rescue services better plan for and respond to a fire. They will also improve fire safety in high-rise buildings by setting a baseline on safety checks on lifts for firefighters and other key pieces of firefighting equipment and, in mid-rise buildings, on doors. They will also make residents in all multi-occupied residential buildings feel safer by providing them with fire safety instructions and information on the importance of fire doors.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-england-regulations-2022>

#### *Personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) consultation response, and new consultation*

We are publishing the responses to our PEEPs consultation which we ran from 8 June to 19 July 2021. We have taken account of the substantial difficulties of mandating PEEPs in high-rise residential buildings and have developed new proposals that we are confident deliver proportionality, practicality and improve safety for those vulnerable people living in the highest risk buildings. We will now consult and seek views on these proposals.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/personal-emergency-evacuation-plans>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/emergency-evacuation-information-sharing>

#### *Fourth thematic update on Grenfell Tower inquiry phase 1 recommendations*

We are publishing our latest update on progress against Grenfell Tower inquiry phase 1 recommendations. This shows progress made by Government Departments, and relevant public authorities, including the London Fire Brigade, and National Fire Chiefs Council. The tracker provides a digestible, transparent way for the public to hold those responsible for delivering recommendations to account.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quarterly-thematic-update-on-progress-against-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-1-recommendations>

Fires in high-rise residential buildings in England are rare, and thankfully deaths from fires in high-rise residential buildings are extremely rare. The Government, however, are committed to learning the lessons of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

[HCWS35]



# Ministerial Correction

*Wednesday 18 May 2022*

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Plastic Waste

*The following is an extract from Environment, Food and Rural Affairs oral questions on 28 April 2022.*

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** Recycling plastics is energy and emission-intensive, so would we not be better to end the use of plastic bottles and concentrate on the deposit and return of glass ones?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, but actually it is about the use of the appropriate material for the appropriate product. Plastic is a good product when used sensibly and when it can be recycled, and we often now see 100% recycled plastic. We are

introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers so that consumers can easily recycle them. News of that and work on it will be coming forward shortly, **to be delivered in 2025.**

*[Official Report, 28 April 2022, Vol. 712, c. 855.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill).*

An error has been identified in my response to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne).

The correct response should have been:

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, but actually it is about the use of the appropriate material for the appropriate product. Plastic is a good product when used sensibly and when it can be recycled, and we often now see 100% recycled plastic. We are introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers so that consumers can easily recycle them. News of that and work on it will be coming forward shortly.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 18 May 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	676	<b>SCOTLAND</b> .....	667
Carnforth bid for Great British Railways		Cost of Living .....	674
headquarters .....	807	Future Defence Policy and the Armed Forces .....	668
Doncaster bid for Great British Railways		Government's Energy Security Strategy .....	670
headquarters .....	806	Improving Union Connectivity .....	671
Engagements .....	676	UK Shared Prosperity Fund .....	667

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 18 May 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>DEFENCE</b> .....	41WS	
Defence and Security Industrial Strategy .....	41WS	
<b>HOME DEPARTMENT</b> .....	43WS	
Fire Reform White Paper and Improving Fire		
Safety for the Public .....	43WS	

# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Wednesday 18 May 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL</b>	
<b>AFFAIRS</b> .....	3MC
Plastic Waste .....	3MC



No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than  
Wednesday 25 May 2022**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE  
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

---

## CONTENTS

**Wednesday 18 May 2022**

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 667] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Scotland*  
*Prime Minister*

**Foreign National Offender Removal Flights [Col. 687]**

*Statement—(Tom Pursglove)*

**Debate on the Address (Sixth day) [Col. 702]**

*Amendment—(Rachel Reeves)—on a Division, negatived*  
*Amendment—(Ed Davey)—on a Division, negatived*  
*Amendment—(Ian Blackford)—on a Division, negatived*  
*Main Question—(Graham Stuart)—Division, agreed to*

**Petitions [Col. 806]**

**UK Songwriters and Composers [Col. 808]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Written Statements [Col. 41WS]**

**Ministerial Correction [Col. 3MC]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

---