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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 12 July 2023

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Conversion Practices: Legislative Ban

1. **Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): When she plans to bring forward legislative proposals to ban conversion practices. [905949]

The Minister for Equalities (Stuart Andrew): The Government remain committed to publishing a draft Bill on banning conversion practices for pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses in this parliamentary Session.

Stephen Farry: It is now over five years since the Government first made a commitment to legislate on conversion therapy, and more recently there was a promise that legislation would be tabled this spring. Can the Minister elaborate on some of the reasons for the delay, and perhaps be more clear about when the legislation will be brought forward?

Stuart Andrew: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are absolutely committed to introducing the Bill in its draft stage as soon as possible. It is a complex matter. It is something that I have felt very passionately about over many years, but it is right that we get the legislation right. I hope that we will be able to present it as soon as possible.

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

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me and, indeed, with the former Prime Minister that conversion therapy is “abhorrent”? If he does agree, does he think it is abhorrent for everyone?

Stuart Andrew: I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for her question. I absolutely agree that it is abhorrent; moreover, it does not work—that is a serious point. Yes, I do believe that that is with regard to everyone.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Given that the Minister has agreed that conversion therapy is abhorrent, and given what my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) said about five years having passed since we were first told that it would be banned—we were then told that the Bill had been scrapped, then that it would be coming back, and then that it would come back with a loophole about consent—does the Minister

agree that that confusion is causing unacceptable stress, confusion and fear among the LGBT community? Will the Government commit to ending the confusion soon?

Stuart Andrew: I do not want anybody in the LGBT community to feel fear—I have had that experience myself and I would not wish it on anyone. That is why we are making sure that the Bill is a good Bill that delivers good law to ensure that we outlaw those abhorrent practices. I recognise that the delay has caused some issues for the community, but I assure them that we are on their side.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): Through my personal dealings with the Minister, I know how much he is committed to making sure that this legislation comes forward. Can he reassure me that, despite what some have said, the Bill is not about stopping parents from having meaningful conversations with their children who may be questioning their sexuality?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend raises an important point. That is why we need to consider the evidence carefully; those conversations that parents have with their children are really important. I will never forget the conversations I had with my mum and dad, who helped me when I was coming out.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Some 1,835 days have passed since the Government first promised to ban conversion practices. That is longer than it takes to make a good Bill—it is longer than it took to build the Empire State Building and the Shard put together. We were told in January that a Bill would be published “shortly”. Seven months later, can the Minister tell LGBT people how many more days, weeks, months, or even years they must wait?

Stuart Andrew: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave a moment ago.

Anneliese Dodds: The answer that the Minister gave a moment ago was that we would see something before the end of this Parliament. I am afraid that is not good enough for those LGBT people who have been waiting for too long.

I will ask the Minister another question. We heard from the Government during their consultation on this ban—even that was almost two years ago now—that they would let some of the worst practitioners off the hook by including a consent loophole. Does the Minister seriously think that LGBT people can consent to abuse and, if not, will he end the charade and remove that loophole so that every LGBT person is protected?

Stuart Andrew: I respectfully say to the hon. Lady that she has not seen the Bill yet, so it is a bit early to make those comments. This is exactly why we are making sure that a Joint Committee of both Houses looks at the Bill; it is a very complex piece of legislation. We want to make sure that it outlaws those awful practices, but also ensures that people—clinicians, parents, teachers and so on—do not feel a chilling effect. It is right that we get stakeholders and people from this House engaged in that process, so that when the Bill is presented to the House for debate, it is in the best possible position.

Pension Credit Uptake

2. **Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on increasing the uptake of pension credit among older people. [905950]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): Since April last year, we have been running a substantial campaign to raise awareness and increase take-up. There are strong indications that this campaign is working. Applications for pension credit were around 75% higher in the year to May 2023 than in the same period the year before.

Anne McLaughlin: My retired constituents, from Dennistoun to Ruchazie, from Carntyne to Blackhill, and across the north and east of Glasgow, know that I am a champion for their rights. That is why I set up the all-party parliamentary group on pension credit, and why I and my team have sat with hundreds of older constituents and helped them to apply for pension credit, which is after all their right. I choose to do this as a constituency MP, but it is our role to champion the rights of older people, and the Minister is not telling me anything that is giving me any comfort that she is actually going to champion them. When will she start doing that?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for the work that she does for her constituents. Many MPs use the Help to Claim service or the benefits calculator to assist constituents. I think she will be keen to know that the Minister responsible for pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), announced the innovative Invitation to Claim trial, which will be held in 10 local authorities across Great Britain this summer. It will involve the Department for Work and Pensions sending letters to 2,600 pensioner households identified by housing benefit data and most likely to be entitled to pension credit. That is on top of the wide-ranging communications we are already doing.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for the answers she has given. Clearly, there is a reluctance among people who are entitled to this benefit to actually claim it. What action is she taking to break down that taboo, so that people who are fully entitled to this money and desperately need it actually claim it?

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for that point because some people do not come forward. It is in their make-up. We need to help them to be encouraged that they are absolutely entitled to the benefit. I reassure him that the DWP received around 21,000 claims in the two weeks in the run-up to 19 May, which was 171% up compared with the corresponding weeks in 2022, so the actions we are all taking are working.

Equality Act 2010: Public Bodies

3. **Neale Hanvey** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): What steps she is taking to help ensure that public bodies implement the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. [905951]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch):

The Government have published a range of advice and guidance to help public bodies comply with the Equality Act. The Equality and Human Rights Commission also publishes technical guidance on complying with the public sector equality duty. I will shortly be reissuing my December 2021 update to Ministers on how to comply with the public sector equality duty, especially when it comes to completing equalities impact assessments, and I hope that that is distributed widely.

Neale Hanvey: With the Met police force reluctant to investigate murderous threats towards three sitting MPs for their lawfully protected beliefs and characteristics; a convicted criminal calling for violence against women at Trans Pride incoherently defended as freedom of expression by that same force; and broadcasters, journalists, faith leaders and even the Equalities and Human Rights Commissioner for Scotland all having had their bank accounts closed for what appear to be their lawfully protected characteristics, will the Minister meet me and other affected Members to consider how we tackle this dangerous misinformation, rampant homophobia and misogyny being promoted in our institutions by organisations such as Stonewall?

Kemi Badenoch: I take the points that the hon. Gentleman has made very seriously, and I would be very happy to meet him. We are a free and fair society, and we must protect free speech and allow open discussion, as long as it does not break the law.

On bank account closures, banks and other payment services, providers occupy a privileged place in our society, and it would be a serious concern if financial services are being denied to anyone exercising their right to lawful free speech. I need to express this: a notice period of fair and open communication with a customer must apply in those situations that relate to termination on grounds other than suspected or actual criminal offences or when otherwise allowed by law. The Government are currently reviewing evidence on whether the existing payment services and account termination framework is operating effectively, or if further clarification is needed.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): We were all delighted that the Government appointed an independent inquiry chaired by Lord Ethenerton to look into the disgraceful treatment of LGBT soldiers, sailors and air people before 2001 and the fact that those wrongs have not yet been put right. That report was given to the Government some three weeks ago now, and I understand that the Government have said they will produce it before the summer. Will they also answer the report at that time, will they give us a date for it and will there be an oral statement in this House, so we can quiz the Government on the report?

Kemi Badenoch: I will speak to my ministerial colleagues in the Ministry of Defence who have received the report, and ensure that my hon. Friend receives a response.

Female-led Businesses

4. **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help increase the number of female-led businesses. [905952]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch):

I am working with Cabinet colleagues to harness the skills, innovation and talent of UK female entrepreneurs, and widen opportunities for the next generation of women setting up businesses. That is why we launched a women-led high-growth enterprise taskforce. Building on the work of the Rose review, it brings together some of the country's most successful female entrepreneurs, led by the founder of Starling Bank, Anne Boden.

Virginia Crosbie: I thank the Minister for her answer.

We have brilliant successful female entrepreneurs across Anglesey, including Laurel Knight at Medic 1, Lynne Farr at the Beaumaris Artisan Market, Helen Evans at the Amlwch Artisan Studio, and Jo Weir at Beau's Tea Rooms. We also have some fabulous successful male entrepreneurs such as Celfyn and Emrys Furlong. They are supported by organisations such as Alison Cork's Make It Your Business, the British Library's Business and IP Centre, the Federation of Small Businesses Wales, and Small Business Saturday UK. How are this Government supporting those organisations to broaden their reach and empower even more fabulous female entrepreneurs?

Kemi Badenoch: My hon. Friend rightly mentions some of the highly successful initiatives led by entrepreneurs, male and female, across Anglesey, which we fully support. Those are exactly the sort of organisations that we like to see flourish across the UK. Just last week, I spoke to the women and enterprise all-party group, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey). That was attended by female entrepreneurs from across the country, who talked about how the Government are investing in women, and how the Rose review and the high-growth enterprise taskforce are having an impact on their lives and businesses.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Pathways, a new approach for women and enterprise, was commissioned by the Scottish Government. It has begun to implement, along with key stakeholders, including enterprise agencies, the Scottish National Investment Bank and private investors, ways to include under-represented parts of society in the business system. What steps are the UK Government taking to weave inclusivity through the business support system in a similar fashion to that in Scotland?

Kemi Badenoch: We believe that businesses are best placed to do that themselves, and we provide as much advice, guidance and support as possible. For example, the British Business Bank has led many schemes and initiatives to promote inclusivity in the workplace. However, if there is something specific where the hon. Gentleman thinks there is a gap in the market, I would be happy to hear about such an initiative.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Under the Conservatives, just 12% of executive directors of FTSE 250 companies are women—a gap that will not close until 2058 at the current rate. Women who want to go into business cannot wait for the Conservatives to get their act together. They need a new deal for working people, a review of the gender pay gap, and a menopause action plan in the workplace. That is Labour's pro-business, pro-women plan to smash the glass ceiling and break down the barriers. Does the Minister have a plan?

Kemi Badenoch: I am afraid that the shadow Front-Bench spokeswoman is confusing all sorts of different things. FTSE directors are not the ones who need support getting into the workplace. She is talking about a menopause action plan, but we have had one, completed and delivered it, while Labour Members are just talking about bringing one in, which shows that they are not paying attention. We are the only ones who will be doing what is right to promote gender equality in the workplace.

Government Equalities Office: Policy Relating to Men

5. Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): If she will hold discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of including policy relating to men on the list of Government Equalities Office responsibilities. [905954]

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): The Government are already taking action to improve outcomes for men and boys. For example, through the introduction of shared parental leave, men now have more opportunity to take time away from the workplace to care for their children. We continue to work closely across Government to embed equalities policies for both men and women.

Nick Fletcher: I thank the Minister for her answer, but does she believe that there should be a Minister for Men, as there is a Minister for Women?

Maria Caulfield: I thank my hon. Friend for his hard work in this space as chair of the all-party group on issues affecting men and boys. He knows—this is with my health hat on—of the work that we are doing to improve lung cancer outcomes for men, and about the suicide prevention strategy that will be coming forward; we know that middle-aged men are at particular risk. I reassure him that the Equality Hub has responsibility for both men and women to ensure equality for all, and I will speak to the Minister for Women and Equalities so that we can be clearer about how that work impacts on men.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Current legislation requires all public facilities to have sanitary bins in female and gender-neutral toilets. However, as highlighted by the Boys Need Bins campaign, hygiene bins need to be provided in men's toilets. What steps is the Minister taking to introduce legislation that addresses that issue?

Maria Caulfield: I reassure the hon. Lady that work is going on in that space. My ministerial colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions are looking at this, and will be updating the House shortly.¹

Gender and Racial Inequality in the Workplace

6. Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): What steps the Government is taking to help tackle (a) gender and (b) racial inequality in the workplace. [905955]

9. Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What steps the Government is taking to help tackle (a) gender and (b) racial inequality in the workplace. [905958]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): The Government have taken numerous steps to tackle gender and racial inequality in the workplace, as seen

1.[Official Report, 17 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 9MC.]

with the comprehensive actions outlined in our landmark “Inclusive Britain” strategy, as well as various initiatives to support women in the workplace. As outlined in our “Inclusive Britain” report, we are working towards a new voluntary inclusion confident scheme to support employers on clear, manageable advice on effective diversity and inclusion interventions.

Hannah Bardell: Like most things in this place, this Government’s policy on parental leave is in the dark ages. Research by Pregnant Then Screwed shows that better-paid parental leave for all parents would bring better equality in the labour market, yet this Government seem dogged in their determination to stand still. Why are the Government blocking greater gender equality in the workplace?

Kemi Badenoch: I completely disagree with the hon. Lady. This Government have done more than any other to promote gender equality in the workplace, including bringing in policies such as shared parental leave. We have also brought in extended redundancy protection for those on maternity leave and introduced carer’s leave, and we are supporting legislation to strengthen the protections against harassment in the workplace.

Ms Qaisar: A new report from the Fawcett Society shows the motherhood pay penalty and how mothers with two children take home 26% less income than women without children, impacting on a woman’s income and earning power throughout her working life. It compounds the effects of the ethnicity pay gap. Will the UK Government tackle that by making flexible working the default and introducing mandatory gender and ethnicity pay gap reporting?

Kemi Badenoch: We have just finished a private Member’s Bill that makes the right to ask for flexible working mandatory. That strikes the right balance for business, rather than making it mandatory for people to demand flexible working. Not every business can provide it, and it is not something that will improve equality in the workplace.

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): When I asked black and minority ethnic residents in Basingstoke about their experience at work, their responses were concerning. I have been working especially with our big local employers, the local education authority and the NHS to tackle the issues. What is my right hon. Friend doing to ensure that public services are exemplars when it comes to race equality in the workplace?

Kemi Badenoch: If my right hon. Friend sees the work that we have put into our “Inclusive Britain” strategy, she will see that almost everything that is in action is about the public sector. There is so much we can do to promote racial equality in the workplace, but we need to do that fairly and transparently, as well as universally. The Equality Act 2010 protects characteristics, not groups. If she would like to work with me on any specific initiative, I would be keen to hear more from her about what she has been working on.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): There are growing concerns about new technology such as artificial intelligence and automation software being used in recruitment and employment. Studies show that AI

perpetuates bias across gender, race, age and disability, as well as dialect and regional differences of speech. What recent assessment has the Minister made of the equalities impact of AI use in recruitment and the workplace? Has she raised that with Cabinet colleagues?

Kemi Badenoch: Yes, I have raised it with Cabinet colleagues. In fact, I had a meeting with the Government chief scientific officer just last week on this issue. It is a concern that AI can embed bias, and that means we need to look at the datasets and large language models that are informing the AI being used. Equality impact assessments apply to the public sector equality duty, and much of AI is being done in the private sector. We will do our part, but I am keen to hear from Members about specific initiatives that they think can help.

Topical Questions

T1. [905974] **Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): In February this year, we announced the STEM ReCharge pilot to support parents and carers back into science, technology, engineering and mathematics roles. Since then, we have recruited and trained the first cohort of engineering and technology returners in the midlands and the north of England. They have received personalised training and support to help to get them back into the workforce, and we are now recruiting a second cohort, who will use insight and lessons learned from the pilot to develop new guidance, so that STEM employers across the UK can benefit from the full wealth of the returning STEM group.

Dame Maria Miller: The summer holidays, which are approaching, see a spike in domestic abuse. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that people know there is help available? Will she lend her support to the campaign I am running in Basingstoke with the police and crime commissioner Donna Jones to help to make sure that victims of domestic abuse in north Hampshire know they are not alone and that there is help there?

Kemi Badenoch: I agree with my right hon. Friend. It is important that people know where to go for help when they have experienced domestic abuse. The Government are providing police and crime commissioners with dedicated ringfenced funding for at least 900 independent sexual violence and domestic abuse advisers and will fund an additional 100, bringing the total to more than 1,000 by 2025.

T2. [905975] **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** The cost of living crisis disproportionately affects disabled constituents who are reliant on specialist diets and equipment and now face increased food and energy costs. Will the Minister confirm what cross-governmental action the Government can take to better support disabled constituents with those additional costs?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): The Government recognise the challenges for disabled people and those with health

conditions. The £150 disability cost of living payment should be seen as one part of the overall package. The benefits calculators on gov.uk will help people to claim the wider benefits that are out there—that is just one of the payments.

T3. [905976] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): Last week, I hosted the Institute of Physics and its campaign to increase diversity in physics, which is the second most popular A-level for boys but only the 16th for girls. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to encourage more girls to study physics beyond GCSE?

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): Studying STEM A-levels such as physics can boost potential earnings and, with a growing demand for students with STEM qualifications in the jobs market, it is important that girls take that opportunity. We are therefore working with the Department for Education in funding the Inclusion in Schools project, which is designed to increase the uptake of A-level physics among students from under-represented groups, including girls.

T4. [905977] **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Homelessness is on the rise, and it disproportionately affects young LGBT+ people. The youth LGBT+ homelessness charity Albert Kennedy Trust has reported a 58% increase in new referrals over the past four years. Will the Minister work with Cabinet colleagues to better understand the specific challenges that people in the community face with homelessness and look at what more can be done to support them?

The Minister for Equalities (Stuart Andrew): The hon. Lady raises a very important point. I am pleased to report that I have met colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and we have held a roundtable to discuss exactly those issues. One of the key elements, which we really need to do, is to gather the data so that we can better understand some of the causes and what the solutions might be to help those people.

T6. [905979] **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): How many discussions has the Secretary of State had with Department for Education colleagues about forthcoming guidance on trans-identifying children?

Kemi Badenoch: I have been working closely with the Education Secretary, because it is important that we get the guidance for schools right. It must show schools how to be compassionate to pupils questioning their gender in a way that is compliant with the Equality Act 2010, including ensuring that single-sex spaces are maintained and the safety and wellbeing of all pupils is not compromised.

T5. [905978] **Amy Callaghan** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Conversion therapy should be banned entirely, not with a voluntary loophole, as this Government intend, which we know means that conversion therapy will be open to coercion. The loophole is so large that it will leave any Bill meaningless. Will the Minister commit to a full ban on conversion therapy, as supported by organisations such as Stonewall and Time for Inclusive Education in Scotland?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady raised some important points. That is exactly why we have taken considerable care to engage with a whole range of stakeholders to consider all the issues that need addressing. It is precisely because of those points that we are going for pre-legislative scrutiny so that all of those issues can be looked at again, to ensure that we present the very best Bill to help people who are subject to these horrible crimes.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): GambleAware figures show that the number of women seeking help for problem gambling doubled between 2015 and 2020, with up to 1 million women deemed to be at risk. Data also shows that women are less likely to participate in sports betting; instead, they are more active in online bingo and casino-style games. What work is my right hon. Friend doing with Cabinet colleagues to highlight the risk of online gambling, to reduce stigma and to help women seek treatment?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend raises a really important point. We recently published the gambling White Paper, in which we address a number of those issues. Stigma is a very important one. We want people to come forward and get the treatment they need. We are also introducing a statutory levy on gambling operators to ensure that we have the prevention and treatment needed to help those suffering with gambling harm.

T7. [905980] **Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): Earlier this year, the Government cut almost £6 million of funding for a Save the Children programme providing education and other services to girls in Afghanistan, despite a promise to put women and girls at the heart of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's work. Will the Secretary of State work with colleagues at the Department to deliver on the Government's commitment and reinstate that funding?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Educating girls is one of the top priorities under the British Government's international development strategy—indeed, it is the way to change the world. Over the last five years for which figures are available, the British taxpayer procured a decent education for more than 8 million children in the poor world.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Oil Production and Domestic Energy Prices

Q1. [905982] **Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): Whether he has made an assessment of the impact of a potential reduction in oil production by Saudi Arabia and Russia on domestic energy prices.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Oliver Dowden): I have been asked to reply.

Global oil prices have remained largely stable this year. This has not changed following the announcement of additional production cuts by Saudi Arabia and Russia. We expect that the impact of the cuts will be

mitigated by the increase in supply from other producers and a decrease in global oil demand, as we have seen previously.

Steven Bonnar: If we want to insulate ourselves from future price rises, we need to invest in a greener future. The United States gets it: it has committed \$370 billion to net zero energy. The European Union gets it: it is set to match that figure. In Scotland, we get it. We have the ambition to lead the world on renewable energy. We have the energy but not the power. Why is Westminster trying to block Scotland's path to a safer, greener future?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We of course will continue to invest in renewables, but I say to the Scottish National party that we should also invest in our energy independence, and that means investing in the North sea. If we fail to invest in the North sea, we will be more reliant on foreign producers and we will have higher carbon emissions as we import from elsewhere.

Engagements

Q2. [905983] Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 12 July.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Vilnius, attending the NATO summit. It is an opportunity to build on the work we have done over the past year, strengthening NATO and supporting Ukraine. In addition to my meetings in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Craig Mackinlay: New Labour's old mantra was "Education, education, education." Its new one seems to be "Tax education, tax education, tax education." Does the Deputy Prime Minister share my disgust at Labour's plans to tax education of choice, which could lead to 40,000 pupils being sent into the state sector, with a cost to the taxpayer? A number of English language schools in my constituency are concerned that this will also apply to them, as well as to out-of-hours tuition and sports training. Does the Deputy Prime Minister object to those measures as strongly as I do?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Once again, we have seen the Labour party putting the politics of envy above the interests of children in this country. As my hon. Friend rightly highlights, recent analysis shows that it could lead to over 40,000 pupils leaving the schools they are in, placing further burdens on existing schools and costing £300 million.

Mr Speaker: I call the deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I know you are a keen historian, Mr Speaker, so I looked up the last time a Prime Minister missed two sessions in a row for other engagements. It was March 1996. I am very proud to be filling the boots of Lord John Prescott, but I think it is safe to say that the Deputy Prime Minister is no Heseltine. John Prescott asked, why is it that in Tory Britain, tens of thousands of families are facing repossession, negative equity and homelessness? Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us, 27 years later, why I am having to ask the same question?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Clearly, the right hon. Lady did not listen to my previous comments. The Prime Minister is at NATO. Of course, that would not be a problem if she had had her way. Her old boss wanted to abandon Ukraine, abolish the Army and withdraw from NATO, and he certainly would not be going to any summit. When it comes to house building, I will take no lectures from the Labour party on home ownership. My parents would not have been able to buy their own home if it were not for Margaret Thatcher and the reforms introduced by her Government, and this Government are building on those with record house building.

Angela Rayner: I think the right hon. Gentleman is taking lessons from the former Prime Minister on telling the facts. The last Labour Government worked hard to dramatically reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation, but under the Tories the number of homeless children has risen by 75%. I am proud of our record on tackling child poverty. Does the right hon. Gentleman feel ashamed of his?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will tell the right hon. Lady what this Government have done: we have lifted 400,000 children out of child poverty; we have introduced the national living wage, something the Labour party totally failed to do; and we have increased the national living wage by the largest amount ever, meaning £1,800 for working people and cutting their taxes by doubling the personal allowance. That is the surest way to ensure we lift people out of poverty, and it would never have happened under the Labour party.

Angela Rayner: It is like the ghost of Prime Minister past. I tell the right hon. Gentleman that he should be careful about the stats he uses, because the Children's Commissioner warned the other Prime Minister about peddling false narratives on child poverty around those figures. The truth is that rising bills, soaring mortgages and plummeting real wages are pushing more and more families to the brink. Those already struggling are being hit hardest by the Tory mortgage bombshell and rising food costs, so can the right hon. Gentleman tell us how many primary school children have been pushed into poverty since his Government took power?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I say to the right hon. Lady that it was this Conservative party, not the Labour party, that extended free school meals to all five, six and seven-year-olds—something the Labour party failed to do—and that sits alongside many measures we are taking to help people with the cost of living. We paid half of families' energy bills last winter, funded by our 75% windfall tax, and we are freezing fuel duty, helping families with childcare and delivering on our pledge to reduce the debt. It may come as a surprise to her, but balancing the books means more than working out how many more millions to take from her union paymasters.

Angela Rayner: Once again, the right hon. Gentleman talks about balancing the books. His party crashed the economy and he seems to be completely oblivious to what it is like for working people in this country at the moment. New research out today shows that 400,000 more

primary school-age children are growing up in poverty since his Government came to office. Why does he think that is?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will take absolutely no lectures whatsoever from the Labour party about how we help children in the most need. It is record investment from this Government in education—£2 billion more this year, £2 billion next year—which is giving those very children the best possible start in life, ensuring that we have the highest reading standards in the western world. I have to say to the right hon. Lady, her leader says he hates tree huggers, but they seem very keen on hugging that magic money tree.

Angela Rayner: The right hon. Gentleman does not even acknowledge that child poverty is rising, let alone explain why. What hope has he got of solving it? Let me try a simpler question: how many kids do not have a permanent address today compared with when Labour left office in 2010?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We can exchange all these numbers across the Dispatch Boxes, but these are the numbers that matter. There are 1.7 million fewer people in absolute poverty under this Government, 400,000 fewer children, 200,000 fewer pensioners and 1 million fewer people of working age, because the single best route out of poverty is a job, and record numbers of people—4 million more under this Government—have got a job. That is the difference between this Conservative party and the Labour party, which always leaves office with unemployment higher.

Angela Rayner: What matters is what people feel every single day at the moment—going to work yet they cannot afford their mortgage, their rent or their Bills, because of this Conservative Government. There are 55,000 more children without a permanent address today compared with when the Tories took office 13 years ago. We have gone from a Labour Cabinet focused on tackling child poverty to Tory Ministers who will not even admit the problem. Just as in March 1996, they can offer only excuses, not answers. John Prescott asked Michael Heseltine that day:

“How can the right hon. Gentleman be so complacent in the face of the sheer misery created by the Government’s policies?”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 147.]

Twenty-seven years on, why are we asking the exact same thing?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I know there is an Opposition reshuffle coming up, but this audition for John Prescott’s old job is getting a little bit hackneyed. It is this Government who have lifted 400,000 children out of poverty. I hear the right hon. Lady claiming that Labour is the party of working people, but under their policies people cannot even get to work. They support Just Stop Oil protesters blocking our roads, they support their union paymasters stopping our trains, and of course they support the hated ultra-low emission zone stopping cars across our capital. While Conservatives get Britain moving, Labour stands in everyone’s way.

Q5. [905986] Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Given that the Mansion House compact does not encourage our pension funds to invest specifically

in British companies, what more can the Government do to encourage greater investment in our companies, especially climate technology start-ups, which increasingly are going abroad to find the funding they require, to the benefit of our competitors?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point about both start-up capital and ensuring that we get more money to high-growth companies. The Chancellor’s pension compact is a very important step forward, which will unlock £75 billion of additional investment. I am quite confident that large amounts of that will go to UK companies, and it sits alongside measures such as the Edinburgh reforms to financial services, which will help improve financial services in this country and unlock money for those industries.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP deputy leader.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Last month, the Deputy Prime Minister dismissed warnings from the SNP Benches that mortgage rates were nearly back to where they were after the disastrous mini-Budget. This week, mortgage rates have surpassed those levels. How high do they need to go before he and his Government take this seriously?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Lady knows—people around the world know—that the driver of higher mortgage rates is higher inflation, and higher inflation is caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and by the post-covid supply chains. What we have to do is make sure that we halve inflation. It is only by getting inflation under control that we will be able to get mortgage rates down, and that requires discipline—discipline on spending, on public sector pay and on energy supply, all of which are lacking from the SNP.

Mhairi Black: The Bank of England predicts that mortgage payments will rise by at least £500 for a million households. The Prime Minister says that people need to “hold their nerve”; the Chancellor said just last night that mortgage holders should just “shop around”. Speaking of his own party, the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) said:

“If the circus doesn’t stop by Christmas, it’s over”.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister understand that people cannot afford to wait until Christmas and that they need help right now?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The fundamental thing that we have to do is to halve inflation. That is an approach that the International Monetary Fund “strongly endorses”, because higher inflation drives higher mortgage rates. But that is not all we are doing: with the mortgage charter, signed up to by 90% of mortgage providers, we are giving people help to extend their terms, to go interest-only and to reduce their monthly payments. That action is supported by Martin Lewis, a real money-saving expert, unlike the big spenders on the SNP Benches.

Q6. [905987] Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): Last year, I visited Abbeyfield House in Wednesfield and was impressed by the model of assisted living for older people that gave them the independence of a self-contained flat but the ability to eat and socialise together. I was deeply concerned to hear that a consultation is under way to close

Abbeyfield House in Wednesfield. I went back there to speak to older people, and they unanimously want to stay there. Abbeyfield is a charity—His Majesty the King has been a patron for 40 years now—and it cannot meet the cost of updating the estate to meet environmental standards. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to see what support the Government can offer to Abbeyfield so that residents do not have to leave the homes they love?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am of course very happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. I note that we have provided £7.5 billion of additional funding for social care and discharge. On energy specifically, we have an energy advice service to support smaller businesses and we have been piloting new audit and grant schemes that may also help.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): In January, Emily booked an appointment with her local dentist in Chard, Somerset, for 14 June, only to be told by a neighbour at the end of May that the surgery had closed in April. Emily no longer has a dentist, all the remaining surgeries are not taking on any new patients, and Emily does not know what to do, so will the Deputy Prime Minister tell Emily and millions of people like her when they can get an appointment with a local NHS dentist?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman may have missed it, but our NHS workforce plan is investing an extra £2.4 billion into training and retaining crucial NHS staff, including dentists and GPs. The number of dentists will rise by 40%. I say to people across that constituency that the best way they can ensure better services for their NHS is to vote for Faye Purbrick, the Conservative candidate.

Q12. [905993] **Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): Will the Deputy Prime Minister let us know when we can expect allocations from round 3 of the levelling-up fund? When it comes, will it be true to the Prime Minister's pledge that all parts of the country will benefit, including the south-east and, most particularly, the very deserving town of Andover?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As well as my right hon. Friend having been an excellent Minister, I know how committed he is to the town of Andover. We will shortly announce the new approach to the third round and further details will follow shortly.

Q3. [905984] **Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): There are things we encounter in political life that are certain to horrify, appal and sicken us, but I do not think I have ever seen anything quite so grotesque as the painting over of a children's Mickey Mouse mural, as the Home Office did at a detention centre in Kent. No Minister has, so far, roused the necessary compassion or concern to speak out about this. Will the Deputy Prime Minister look into the deeper recesses of his soul and simply condemn it?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what real compassion looks like: stopping the vile people-smuggling trade across the channel that is condemning women and children to death. This Government are

taking action to deal with it through our "stop the boats" Bill, which the Scottish National party shamefully voted against 18 times last night.

Q13. [905994] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): As the party of aspiration, we know the importance of home ownership. According to a recent estimate by Barclays, it now takes eight years for the average first-time buyer to save for a deposit, and in parts of London and the south-east it can take longer. What are the Deputy Prime Minister and the Government doing to improve the prospects for younger people who want to own their own home?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I know my hon. Friend is passionate in championing this issue. Almost 850,000 households have been helped to purchase a home since 2010. In 2021, the number of people getting on to the property ladder for the first time was at a 20-year high, thanks to initiatives such as First Homes and the Help to Buy scheme. Of course, that stands in contrast to the Labour party, which oversaw the lowest level of house building since the 1920s.

Q4. [905985] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): With rising ticket prices, many of my constituents find they can get the best-value fare by going to the staffed ticket office at Lancaster station, which is perhaps why so many of them have signed my petition to save staffing at the station. Is the closure of ticket offices just yet another cost of living bombshell hitting my hard-working constituents?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is important that the railways continue to reform after the record amount of money we gave them during covid. If the hon. Lady is concerned about her constituents getting anywhere on the railways, I gently say that she should condemn the totally unjustified strikes that close them down week after week.

Q15. [905996] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Four summers ago, the unprecedented climate change-driven heatwave caused irreparable damage to Chelmsford's flyover. Since then, people from across Essex have been getting stuck in Chelmsford's traffic jams, which are wasting time and hitting our economic growth. We badly need a new junction at the Army and Navy, but the funding decision has been stuck in Whitehall. Will my right hon. Friend use his cross-Cabinet convening power to get the Treasury and the Department for Transport to agree to the money so that we can deliver a new junction, stop the traffic jams and get Chelmsford moving again?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has been making a powerful case for this scheme, and she does so once again. The Chancellor is sitting next to me and will have heard her. I understand that the outline business case submitted by Essex County Council is being considered by Ministers right now, and all relevant Ministers will have heard her injunction.

Q7. [905988] **Kenny MacAskill** (East Lothian) (Alba): Scottish Ambulance Service statistics show a more than 30% increase in hypothermic call-outs across Scotland last winter, including a staggering 84% increase in the

north in December. Although fuel prices have fallen slightly, food and other costs have risen exponentially. To end the perversity of energy-rich Scotland seeing a third of Scots freezing in fuel poverty, when will the Government bring in a social tariff to ensure that the poor and vulnerable can get through this winter without calling out the ambulance service because they are freezing?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out in his autumn statement, we are exploring the best approach to consumer protection from April 2024 as part of wider retail market reforms. I reiterate that we paid half of energy bills in Scotland last winter, thanks to the strength of our Union.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I remind the Deputy Prime Minister and the House that yesterday was National Remembering Srebrenica Day? May I particularly point out a little-known fact? British soldiers took about 2,000 civilians out of Srebrenica in April 1993. Those British soldiers were from B Squadron 9th/12th Lancers. It is not widely known, but, under my command, they saved a huge number of lives by taking those people out of Srebrenica. They, too, should be remembered for their very gallant actions, because it was very dangerous.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I pay tribute to my right hon. and gallant Friend and to all those whom he commanded in the 1990s. We must honour the memory of those killed, and pay tribute to the extraordinary courage shown by their families, survivors and all those members of our armed forces, who served so gallantly in that situation.

Q8. [905989] **Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): In the Welsh Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) asked the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about the varying comparability factors for Wales of Crossrail, Thameslink and HS2. His answer began:

“you are dragging me into quite complex technical details.”

Then, he gave no complex technical details. I am sure that the people of Wales would be delighted to tackle any complex technical details were the Deputy Prime Minister to explain to the House why we are paying £5 billion for a white elephant in HS2, which, by now, comes nowhere near our country.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is thanks to the strength of our United Kingdom that record sums are going to Wales under the Barnett consequential. Indeed, in the spring Budget we increased devolved Administration funding by £630 million, which included £180 million for the Welsh Government. We are ensuring that resources are going to Wales, so that they can enhance their transport infrastructure.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): If it were not so serious, it would be comical, but in Horning on the Norfolk broads, a whole area is to be totally cut off from a mobile signal until—wait for it—August, because of nesting seagulls taking up residency in the new telecoms mast. Gulls are protected and the nest cannot be moved, but if a family holidaying on the broads gets into distress this summer, they will not be able to make

an emergency call. That could be life-threatening, so will the Deputy Prime Minister please help me by calling on Natural England to be sensible and make sure that, for public safety reasons, we can get a mobile phone mast working in a prime holiday location?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We all love the diversity of wildlife in this country and particularly on the North Norfolk coast, which my hon. Friend represents. He makes a strong point about the balance between that and ensuring that people have access to modern communication facilities, and I shall certainly take that up with Natural England.

Q9. [905990] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Day in, day out, the public and businesses are hit by endless chaos and confusion across Government Departments—for them, clearly, Britain is not working. Paraphrasing what the Deputy Prime Minister said earlier, we know there is a Government reshuffle coming up. So will he tell us: is this down to obstruction and incompetence in the civil service, or is it, rather, that so many of their Ministers are just not up to the job?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We can see from the record of this Government, whether on cutting NHS waiting lists, or on providing record funding for our schools and hospitals, that we have an excellent team who will continue to serve.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): Last week, we all celebrated the 75th anniversary of the NHS, but hon. Members may not be aware that it is also the 75th anniversary of Newton Aycliffe, a new town in my constituency designed by William Beveridge. Will the Deputy Prime Minister ask the Prime Minister to come and visit me, as his constituency neighbour, and celebrate these 75 years, and indeed the 60 years of the community newspaper provided by the Howarth family?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I cannot speak to the Prime Minister's diary, although I will make representations. I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency, if he wishes me to attend instead.

Q10. [905991] **Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): The day I had to phone my bank to tell it that I was having difficulty paying my mortgage was one that has lived with me for years. I found that because my income was so low at the time, ironically, I was not eligible to switch to an interest-only mortgage or get any help. I never want my constituents to feel the terror and abandonment that I felt that day. Can the Deputy Prime Minister understand that? The complete lack of empathy in his responses to the deputy leader of the SNP group suggests not. I welcome the temporary measures, but they are temporary. This mortgage crisis has been two years in the making. Do he and the Prime Minister really think they are going to fix it in 12 months?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is deeply disturbing, upsetting and worrying for anyone to contemplate losing their home. That is exactly why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has introduced the mortgage charter, which 90% of the mortgage market has now signed up to and which will provide support to people. In addition, after three months, people on universal credit can apply for further support.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): A Government survey has shown that 75% of British businesses support improvements to the UK's sick pay system. Yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) launched a report, alongside WPI Economics and the Centre for Progressive Change, with ideas about how that could be done. Will my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister ensure that we get a meeting with the Chancellor, ahead of the autumn Budget, to see what ideas can be developed? They could provide an economic boost of £4 billion to the UK economy.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As ever, my hon. Friend has made a strong case. The Chancellor is sitting next to me and I am quite sure he would be delighted to meet with him.

Q11. [905992] **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The forced isolation of people in care homes or hospitals from their loved ones from the beginning of the pandemic, and its terrible consequences, as well as the many who died alone, has left a profound trauma. We have learned the hard way that the care of a loved one is not an optional extra; it is an essential part of dignified care. My Care Supporters Bill would guarantee that fundamental right. While the Government recognise that there is a problem, their recently announced consultation relates to visiting and not a legal right to a care supporter at all times. Would the Deputy Prime Minister speak to the Prime Minister about bringing forward legislation in the next King's Speech?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the need for care supporters to be able to have that kind of access. I will take away the points he has raised, and raise them with my ministerial colleagues.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): Mr Speaker, you know the value of inter-parliamentary relations and, in particular, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which was founded nearly 135 years ago in this place. We are honoured this week to be joined by the president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr Duarte Pacheco. Would my right hon. Friend join his campaign to get the USA to rejoin this important international organisation?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend knows, the United Kingdom was a founding member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I would very much like the United States to rejoin and I am happy to help make that case.

Q14. [905995] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Not a day goes by without serious sexual harassment allegations in organisations up and down the country. My private Member's Bill on workplace protections from harassment could go a long way to address some of these serious issues. Indeed, the Bill has full Government support. It is currently stuck in the other place, but a compromise is now in sight, so that the Bill can pass through the House of Lords. Our rules require that any amendment made in the House of Lords needs to come back to the House of Commons. Will the Deputy Prime Minister ensure that a small amount of Government time is made available in this place, between now and the end of the parliamentary Session, to ensure that this important Bill will become law?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, we have supported the Bill and we are working on it. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities is very happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss the measures further.

Points of Order

12.35 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not know whether you are as shocked as I am, but the Deputy Prime Minister had the opportunity to correct the record today after he misled the House on 7 June. He failed to do so.

Mr Speaker: Order. As we know, we cannot say “misled”. He must have inadvertently misled the House.

Dawn Butler: Well—

Mr Speaker: No, no, we do it that way.

Dawn Butler: Mr Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister inadvertently misled the House, but did not come to correct the record, even though we had made it clear that he had done so. I refer to the idea of £28 billion costing mortgage payers £1,000 a year. The only place that that appeared was in the *Daily Mail*. He is disrespecting you, Mr Speaker. He is disrespecting Parliament and the House and, according to the ministerial code, he should now resign. Mr Speaker, can you advise me on this? He is in breach of the ministerial code—how can I ensure that he resigns?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for giving me notice of her point of order. As I said last week, the responsibility lies with the Minister to make any necessary correction to the record. It is on the Government to look at themselves. If the ministerial code is not being adhered to, I really think that the rules need to be looked at again so that Ministers—do not forget that elections change Ministers as well—ensure that this House hears the facts. I will leave it at that.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a related point of order. I wrote to the Prime Minister on 17 January to ask him to support my Elected Representatives (Codes of Conduct) Bill, which aims to restore confidence and trust in politics and politicians by, among other things, allowing the independent adviser on ministerial standards

to commission their own inquiries. Unfortunately, I have still had no response from the Prime Minister. I followed this up with a letter on 9 June, which included a series of questions about the process by which he decided not to ask his independent adviser to undertake an inquiry into the Home Secretary in relation to her allegedly pressurising officials to assist her with a speeding offence.

I appreciate that we are about a week from recess, so I wonder whether you can advise me, Mr Speaker, on how I can get a timely response from the Prime Minister?

Mr Speaker: First, let me thank the hon. Member for giving me notice of her point of order. As she will know, this is not a matter for the Chair, but there are clear expectations that correspondence from hon. Members will be dealt with within a reasonable timeframe. I stress that Members deserve early replies on behalf of their constituents. It is the constituents who put MPs in this House. I do not mind which part of the Chamber they come from, but I expect Ministers, who all seem to want the job, to take the job seriously and ensure that hon. Members get the replies in due time.

I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench are making a key note of this to ensure that that reply will be here before the House rises. I am sure, as I know the hon. Member, that she will remind me before the House is up if that reply has not arrived. None the less, I stress that it is time that this Government respect Members from all parts of this House. It is becoming apparent that they are disrespectful and it is not acceptable.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to correct the record. During yesterday's debate on the Illegal Migration Bill, I inadvertently said that the Minister had reminded us that we had taken 550 million refugees since 2015. It was an obvious error. I want to put it on the record that what I meant to say was that the Minister had reminded us that we had taken 550,000 refugees since 2015—a number of which we can still be proud.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for giving notice of her point of order. I am also grateful that she has come forward to correct the record. I hope that she has set an example for others to follow. I thank her for that.

Primary Care Services (Report)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.39 pm

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to appoint an independent reviewer to prepare a quarterly report containing an assessment of primary care services; to require the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament each report prepared by the independent reviewer; to require such reports to include the independent reviewer's assessment of any measures taken to improve general practice services, dental services, community pharmacy services, optometry services, and mental health services; and for connected purposes.

Primary care services across the country are in crisis. People cannot get a GP appointment when they need one, some pharmacies are closing, people are resorting to DIY dentistry, and waiting lists for mental health appointments are sky high. The Government point to their recent long-term workforce plan as evidence that they are taking action, but that plan is only partially funded and will do nothing to increase staff levels now. Perhaps if the Government had not spent a year whipping their MPs to vote against any attempts to put a workforce plan into law, they might have made some progress, but we are where we are and it is legitimate for the British public to expect a Government who can plan for the long term while taking more immediate measures.

To be blunt, it is clear to me that MPs on both sides of the House are losing patience and are worried about the lack of urgency and action from the Government in fixing the front door to our NHS. The Bill seeks to force the Government to come clean about the challenges facing primary care health services specifically, such as GPs and dentists, by appointing an independent reviewer to report on the state and condition of primary care services every three months so that we can hold the Government's feet to the fire on progress.

The Bill cannot come soon enough for patients. Let me start by detailing some of the urgent problems in GP services using a story that I have received from Gareth in Wimbledon. One morning recently, Gareth developed sudden loss of vision in the entire left field in both eyes, rendering him partially blind. Gareth tried to get an appointment with his GP, but due to a lack of appointments that day and a non-existent online booking system, he was instructed to call at 8 am the following morning. It was not until the next day that he managed to get an urgent referral for a brain MRI scan, which confirmed that Gareth had suffered a small stroke. With all strokes, the first 72 hours are critical to reduce the chance of subsequent strokes. His GP was undoubtedly dealing with hundreds of other urgent cases that day, but for Gareth, losing 24 hours due to a lack of capacity at his local GP could have been catastrophic. That is the real-world impact of the Government's failure to recruit and retain GPs, and their failure to invest in IT infrastructure.

Let us remember that back in 2019 the Government promised to deliver 6,000 more GPs. Not only did they break that promise, but the number of fully qualified GPs has fallen by more than 900 since they made it. Those falling numbers have hit some areas harder than others. In places such as Somerset, the falling number of GPs is causing a shortage of appointments. Indeed,

the number of GPs has fallen by 50 since 2016 in the area, and the number of patients per GP has increased by a massive 400. Shockingly, that is far higher than in the vast majority of England. In my county of Hertfordshire, there are now 2,203 patients per GP. I have heard from Denise, who spent the best part of the day on hold before giving up and trying the online booking system, which again turned out to be non-existent. While she was on hold for hours on the phone to her GP, by contrast it took just two minutes for Denise to book an online appointment at Specsavers. Everybody knows that the technology exists; it just has not been funded for our GP services.

All that is why the Liberal Democrats have pledged to ensure that we will have 8,000 more GPs working in the system within five years, with a campaign not only to train and recruit but to retain experienced practitioners. With that expanded workforce, everyone could see their GP within seven days for a first appointment.

However, it is not just the number of staff that is putting pressure on GP services. The Royal College of General Practitioners' recent infrastructure report showed that 40% of general practice staff say their premises are not fit for purpose. Even when integrated care boards want to spend money on primary care infrastructure in city centres, for example, outdated Treasury rules do not allow them to—something that is happening in my St Albans constituency, and which I raised in this Chamber again just yesterday. Putting retention measures in place, accelerating improvements in IT infrastructure, fixing outdated treasury rules on investment in primary care infrastructure are just three of the challenges in general practice on which an independent reviewer could report progress to this House every three months until they are fixed.

In dentistry, too, we see Government incompetence at work. Last year, there was a £400 million underspend on the NHS dentistry budget, despite millions of people needing an appointment and thousands of dentists wanting to provide NHS care. It is absurd. Why are we in this position? Because the contract that the Government offers NHS dentists is so badly designed that dentists will not take it on, as they lose money on NHS dental treatment.

The Liberal Democrats have been calling for reform of the NHS dental contract so that it encourages and incentivises dentists to take on NHS patients, meets patient need and demand rather than arbitrary targets and finally puts an end to dental deserts. Just yesterday, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) forewarned the Government that the Health and Social Care Committee, which he chairs, would be publishing its findings on NHS dentistry, and said that they would make for "uncomfortable reading".

Again, locally, in places such as Somerset, the real-world impact is that there is now only one dentist delivering NHS dental service for every 1,773 people. Somerset is among the 10 areas of England that have seen the biggest rise in patients per dentist since 2015, with each dentist now seeing more than 200 additional people.

However, what is truly an outrage is that tooth decay remains the most common reason for hospital admission among young children. It is a question not just of getting children the care they need, but of good use of public funds. The cost of treating a child for tooth decay in hospital far exceeds that of regular check-ups.

Supervised tooth brushing training for children and removing the value added tax on children's toothbrushes and toothpaste, as the Liberal Democrats have called for, would make a huge difference and cost next to nothing in comparison with dental surgery. Those are things the Government could be getting on with right now.

Of course, we know that community pharmacies are in crisis too, and we can see the impact that is having. For example, Peter from Winchester used to go to the pharmacy in Sainsbury's until this year, when it was closed. The location was perfect, with plenty of space to park, and was easily accessible for disabled people. Now it is closed, Peter must take a special hour-long round trip to the next pharmacy, along heavily congested roads to a car park on a hill with only one disabled parking bay. As someone who is mobility impaired, his access to pharmacy services has been severely limited and his independence curtailed as a direct result of the pharmacy closures now taking place across the country.

This situation is completely unsustainable. The Government cannot just do a Dorothy; they cannot just click their heels together, say "Deliver, deliver, deliver", and expect that GP and dental services will magically improve. They need to do things, they need to make decisions and they urgently need to improve primary care for patients right around the country. This Bill would in effect be a forcing mechanism, which would enable MPs every three months to hold the Government's feet to the fire on their actions—or their inaction—on fixing the front door to our NHS. Given the crisis facing our primary care services, it cannot come soon enough.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Daisy Cooper, Wera Hobhouse, Tim Farron, Richard Foord and Munira Wilson present the Bill.

Daisy Cooper accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November, and to be printed (Bill 352).

Opposition Day

[20TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Automotive Industry

12.50 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that the automotive industry is the jewel in the crown of British manufacturing and believes it can have a bright future creating good jobs for people across the UK; regrets that after 13 years of Conservative neglect the UK risks losing this world-class industry, putting thousands of jobs under threat; condemns the Government for its lack of an industrial strategy and the negative impact this has had on investment in the UK's automotive sector; calls on the Government to urgently resolve the rules of origin changes which are due to take effect in 2024, working with partners across Europe to negotiate a deal that works for manufacturers; and further calls on the Government to adopt an active industrial strategy to build the battery factory capacity needed to secure the automotive sector for decades to come.

It is a real pleasure to open this debate on an issue that I know is close to the hearts of many colleagues and constituents. Many Members present represent some of the most iconic names in UK automotive production. For me, it is very much an issue of huge personal significance. Sunderland, where I grew up, is of course renowned not just for its wonderful football team but for the tremendous success of the Nissan plant. I am very proud to say that many friends from my childhood still work in that plant. Of all the great businesses that I get to visit, that is one of my absolute favourites, and I know that colleagues will feel just as strongly about the parts of the automotive industry that they and their constituencies are associated with.

That industry is full of skilled and committed workers, innovation, export success and huge growth potential. However, we have called this Opposition day debate because even the most ardent defender of the Government could not fail to be worried about the health of the sector as it stands. The British car industry should and could be booming, as should the wider automotive sector, yet production has slumped by over a third under the Conservatives. There are huge concerns about a series of major policy failures, including domestic battery production facilities, trade barriers post Brexit, and higher energy costs and other supply chain issues. Although this is an Opposition day debate, I know that those concerns are shared widely across the House, and I hope that, by having this debate, we are able to express the clear political commitment of this House to that crucial sector.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend will be aware of the world-class Toyota engine plant in my constituency that produces the highest-quality hybrid engines—one of the first plants outside Japan to do so. Does he agree that hybrid is part of the solution, not, as the Government think, part of the problem?

Jonathan Reynolds: I do not know whether I am supposed to declare an interest, but I drive a Toyota hybrid myself—I have a large family and have to get between Manchester and London, and that is a pretty sound option for doing so. I am aware of the issue that my hon. Friend raises, as is the shadow Transport

[Jonathan Reynolds]

Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). We must be careful to ensure that there is certainty so that that transition we are all seeking can happen. I know that there are particular issues relating to that sector and that side of the industry. We are alert to those issues, and we will, of course, work with him, his constituents and the expertise in this country and beyond to ensure that that timescale is done properly. For many people seeking to make the transition—we are seeing a huge response from the public on that—that is the option that is currently available, particularly for families. We must bear in mind that the solution has to be something that works for all our constituents, and we must be cognisant of their concerns. I am grateful to him for raising that point at this stage of the debate.

I worry at times that the Government, and maybe especially the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, do not have a great deal of time for industry at all. Artificial intelligence, tech and financial services are all crucial sectors, but we should not for one moment think that there is no role for industry. Nor should we ever believe that there is a false choice between services and manufacturing. Support for the automotive sector is not nostalgia. Many of the plants that we will talk about in the debate are the lifeblood of their communities, providing good work and good wages. However, just as in other crucial industries—steel is another good example—I get no sense that securing the long-term future of the sector and managing the transition to a low-carbon economy are priorities for the Government.

That is not just the view of the Labour party; it is what industry itself has been telling the Government. Mike Hawes of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said at its recent conference:

“We...need a...response urgently”.

Stellantis has warned that:

“If the cost of EV manufacturing in the U.K. becomes uncompetitive and unsustainable, operations will close.”

The automotive industry faces a series of challenges that must be taken seriously. The rules of origin, which are due to come into force from January next year, will require 45% of a vehicle's value to be made in the UK or the EU or a 10% tariff will be imposed that will destroy most profit margins entirely. Of course, those requirements increase significantly over time. We have a lack of progress on battery manufacturing; Germany already has 10 times the battery-making capacity of the UK. We have wider business challenges, including the highest industrial energy costs in the G7, and rising inflation and borrowing costs.

However, what we have seen from other countries is that none of those challenges is insurmountable. Other countries are pulling ahead. China is home to numerous battery giants such as CATL and BYD, while the United States famously has Tesla. But the EU has also ramped up battery production through initiatives such as the European Battery Alliance and now has 35 battery factories in place. In contrast, the UK is yet to develop a robust battery manufacturing sector, which makes us heavily reliant on imports and risks the long-term presence of automotive production in this country.

I think we all recognise that, over time, vehicles will be built where the batteries are made, not the other way around. We will never be able to match the sheer fiscal

firepower of the US Inflation Reduction Act, but we do have advantages—competitive advantages on workforce and skills, and on research and development—and if we had a Government with sufficient political commitment, the future could be very bright indeed.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Last month, I visited the new Caterham Cars production plant in my constituency, to which the company has had to move because its production is insufficient to meet the demand that it has at the moment. It will take on more employees and apprentices, and it will manufacture more of the vehicles for which it is famous. I remind the shadow Secretary of State that that expansion in the industry has happened under a Conservative Government. Does he welcome that news?

Jonathan Reynolds: I am incredibly happy to welcome that news and the positive story that the hon. Member sets out, but I do not think that any of the success that he has seen detracts from the fact that there are significant policy challenges. The overall number of vehicles has declined, as he will know, and yes, the pandemic and the semi-conductor supply chain issues happened, but that does not remove the need for this House to take seriously the rules of origin, the battery-making capacity and so on. We are not in any way on track. There is also, frankly, the international competitive position. Other countries are simply indicating that they want those industries and that investment much more than we do. It is not so much that the Conservative party has turned up to a gunfight with a knife, but that it is not showing up to the fight at all.

What we need is a plan of action. That is what the Labour party has developed, and it is what we want the chance to implement should we form the next Government. Our plan addresses battery capacity and charging infrastructure, as well as key issues such as planning and grid regulation. We are up front about the challenges that we face, but we are ambitious for the future. Frankly, that is nothing short of what is required. Our plan starts with having an active industrial strategy. I know that some Conservatives do not like that kind of terminology, but I say simply that all countries need an industrial strategy. To go back to the example of Nissan, that was part of an explicit strategy—by even Margaret Thatcher's Government—to attract automotive expertise to the UK. The absence of any coherent modern industrial strategy is hurting investment into the UK.

Other countries are simply pushing ahead, recognising that the challenges that we are facing have to be met nationally by Governments with skin in the game. Industry is crying out, first, for stability, and secondly, for a partner and some clear policy signals. That is exactly what it will get from a Labour Government. That is why we have said that we would put the new Industrial Strategy Council on a statutory footing, giving some reassurance that the instability of the Conservative years is at an end.

Our green prosperity plan will part-fund the battery-making gigafactories that are so essential to our future. That will be catalytic public investment to unlock the much greater sum of private investment we need. The reality is that no battery factory in the world has been developed without that kind of Government commitment. We know that the Government are in talks with some

firms about potential investment decisions, and I say in good faith to Ministers, “That is good. We want you to succeed.” Where those companies need assurances from the Opposition should a change of Government occur, we will of course have those talks. However, it would be far better and a far better deal for the taxpayer to make those offers publicly, and to be negotiating with a range of potential partners to get the best deals for Britain, because domestic battery production is so important.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Could the shadow Minister clarify how many gigafactories this Government have enabled to be built in the UK?

Jonathan Reynolds: I am more than happy to. My hon. Friend will know that we currently have one facility, which is the Envision facility at Nissan in Sunderland. The overall number will depend on how big those factories are, but broadly we will need three to four in the interim, and by 2040 we will need eight to 10.

Germany, for instance, already has four to five gigafactories up and running. A further four are almost up and running, and it is in talks for a further advance on that position. The sense is that Germany is genuinely 10 times ahead of us in that capacity, and while people might think, “Well, Germany is a country with incredible automotive history, reputation and strength”, there are other countries that we are already losing out to. Spain, for instance, has a very active industrial strategy when it comes to the automotive sector, and eastern Europe has had tremendous success in that area. Because automotive is about regional markets, simply seeing what other countries are doing will have huge consequences for the potential for investment in this country. Crucially, we should be playing to the UK’s strengths in areas such as research and development, like the fantastic programmes at the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre in Warwick, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley and I were able to visit recently.

Mark Tami: My hon. Friend has rightly talked about producing batteries, but the position with hydrogen is very similar: if we look at what Germany is doing, particularly with buses and bigger vehicles, we are years behind. We really need to invest in that area.

Jonathan Reynolds: I thoroughly agree—the scale of ambition that I see around the world daunts me when I compare it with this Government’s ambition. There are some incredibly exciting technologies out there, including sodium-ion batteries that would reduce our dependence on lithium and almost certainly cut costs in battery production. Hydrogen is clearly going to be extremely exciting, as are fuel cells, and there are markets for off-road vehicles that could be huge potential markets for the UK. We should also not forget buses: that is an area in which new technology could contribute to things like cleaner air, as well as better transport.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Does the shadow Minister agree that on top of battery innovation and hydrogen innovation, the UK is leading in another field: that of synthetic fuels? However, giving the automotive sector a really strong future in this country involves a whole-system analysis, not just of how the vehicle is manufactured but how the energy that will run it is manufactured. That involves looking again at the zero

tailpipe standards that are coming in, because if we have that whole-system analysis, we will get to green technology and greener transport but with a whole-picture effect.

Jonathan Reynolds: I agree with part of what the hon. Gentleman has said. I agree about the whole-system analysis: many parts of the decarbonisation journey that industry will need to take on will be a much bigger question than simply unplugging one form of old fossil fuel technology and plugging in another. For instance, the steel industry will have to think about scrap if it is to make the conversion to electric arc furnaces; and if we are to move towards synthetic fuels, we will clearly have to look at where the feed stocks are coming from.

However, one of the most defining features of the past 13 years—I say this without any kind of partisanship—has been a series of very ambitious targets from this Government in areas that relate to decarbonisation, but with no real means to deliver them. That target is then pulled away, and confidence in the British state to decarbonise falls apart. I am thinking particularly about the famous “cut the green crap” comments from the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, regarding home insulation. When we talk about changing existing Government policy, we should not underestimate just how little confidence the international business community has in this Government’s promises at times. Broadly, the approach has been very ambitious targets but with no means to actually deliver them, which undermines the case.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very effective speech. As he is talking about targets, will he come on to the roll-out of charging points? My constituency has three motorways in it and incredibly high levels of pollution. We need to remove all the barriers, both to net zero and to reducing that pollution. Does my hon. Friend agree that constituencies in the north such as mine need that situation addressed? It is shameful that, as I understand it, more chargers were installed in Westminster this year than across the whole of the north of England. We in the north have those issues of pollution, and we need to move faster in addressing them. My hon. Friend may be planning to come on to that point, but it is an important one.

Jonathan Reynolds: I am incredibly grateful to my hon. Friend for making those points. The approach of the Front Bench—from her, from me on industrial policy, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley on transport policy—must bring those two things together. We need the policies in place that will make this country a world leader in the production of vehicles and ensure that it also works for consumers. She raises the fact that there are more charging points in Westminster—I know my hon. Friend’s constituency, which is not far from mine—and the difference between comparable parts of this country, north and south, in the level, density and availability of chargers is unthinkable, let alone in comparison with Norway, for instance. Not only do we not have enough chargers but grid, maintenance and connection issues often mean they are out of order. I absolutely assure my hon. Friend that when we as a shadow Cabinet and a potential Government think about these issues, both vehicle production and consumers are paramount. Clearly, consumers want to purchase

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electric vehicles—that is the growth part of the market—but too often we do not have the infrastructure in place. It cannot be some form of novelty. I have driven electric vehicles around Greater Manchester when it was something of a novelty—I could get access to chargers and, at times, preferential parking spaces near Deansgate, which is no small thing—but for mass market usage, neither the policies nor the infrastructure are yet in place. That needs to be widely recognised.

On the international trade position, it was always imperative to have a domestic battery industry, but it has become an existential issue because of the Government's approach to our trading relationship with the EU. As discussed in relation to regional export markets, eight in 10 vehicles made in the UK last year were exported, so it is widely recognised that the impending cliff edge in the trade and co-operation agreement with the EU on rules of origin is a serious challenge to the future of the sector in the UK. The Government have been far too slow to realise the scale of that danger, and while they may promise that a deal is coming soon, I am afraid that “soon” cannot come soon enough. Major UK manufacturers including Stellantis, Jaguar Land Rover and Ford have all warned that a failure to reach a deal would cost jobs in the UK.

It has been two and a half years since the trade and co-operation agreement was formally signed. That is precious time that could have been used to plan and prepare, but those are two words that this Government often fail to understand. What have they done in that time? They have not secured investment in battery capacity. They have not improved our relationship with our biggest export market, and they certainly have not worked with industry to find solutions.

We know that a breakthrough is needed, and we would use our plans to make Brexit work to ensure that the rules of origin work for British manufacturers. We cannot achieve a compromise without working with our partners in Europe, and I believe that only Labour can be that good-faith partner. Our plan to invest in battery capacity, alongside compromises on the rules of origin, is the sensible way forward to meet our climate objectives and trade obligations and retain our industrial base.

We will make the UK a clean energy superpower by 2030, with net zero carbon electricity lowering costs for the UK car industry by no longer leaving UK industry prone to the volatility of international gas prices, alongside better grid connections and planning reform to ensure that “made in Britain” does not become a thing of the past. That is the prospectus for action we need. Right now, this country needs some optimism. The mantra of this Government—that this is as good as it gets—is as depressing as it is wrong.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jonathan Reynolds: Go on, then.

Dr Evans: There is a news report about a new global company being launched by the French motor giant Renault and the Chinese manufacturer Geely that will invest €7 billion here, creating 19,000 jobs. Is that not exactly the kind of optimism Conservative Members talk about?

Jonathan Reynolds: I think those companies must have seen the opinion polls and are wondering whether a Labour Government are coming, if there is as positive news as that could be. I would simply say to all Conservative Members that, on any aspect of industrial policy, there is too often on their side a desire to pick individual stories or statistics and try to pretend that substantial and significant issues do not exist. If we talk to anybody reasonably objective in this sector, they will point out—on battery production, rules of origin, charging infrastructure, industrial energy prices—that there are real challenges and they require some serious engagement from the other side, which to date has not been forthcoming.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I would like to add to that comment—my hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, by the way—what was said at the industry conference held by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders a couple of weeks ago. The industry was speaking as one, and I am afraid it was critical of the Government, saying, “All these years on, remember that Baldrick at least had a cunning plan. Sadly, the Government don’t.”

Jonathan Reynolds: I followed that conference very closely—my hon. Friend the shadow Transport Secretary spoke at the conference, and I have spoken at that conference in the past—and that was absolutely the sentiment. Perhaps humility does not come easily to Conservative MPs, but I ask them to take on board those genuine views from the industry on the situation we find ourselves in.

The automotive sector could be a practical illustration of the transition to new jobs and new opportunities that we all want to see. We have laid out our plan for the sector. Some Conservative colleagues may disagree, but let us have from them some alternative proposals, because the status quo will not do. Our motion is a plan to deliver £30 billion in economic growth in the parts of the country that need it most. It is a plan that could create 80,000 additional jobs—good jobs of the kind that people can raise their family on. It is a plan for Britain that would mean we once again lead the pack and feel confident for the future. I believe the choice is clear—a plan under Labour or further decline under the Conservatives—and I think we all know whom the public would prefer behind the wheel.

1.12 pm

The Minister for Industry and Economic Security (Ms Nusrat Ghani): What a disappointing opening speech. There was an opportunity to praise, promote and protect the automotive sector—and to talk about all the positive news stories—but all we have heard for the last 10 or 15 minutes was the automotive sector being talked down. I appreciate that the timing of this debate has not gone well for the Opposition: as my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) mentioned, today we have heard about the Renault Group and Geely having chosen the UK as the headquarters of a new company developing ultra low emission engines and potentially investing billions of pounds in the UK—up to €7 billion. That shows not only the confidence of the automotive sector, but its commitment to the UK, and these are the opportunities or the stories we should be talking about.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) constantly referenced the SMMT statistics, but he forgot to mention the ones he should have reported at the Dispatch Box so that we could once again promote how healthy and dynamic the automotive sector is. Car production in Britain rose for a fourth straight month in May. The SMMT has confirmed that a total of 79,046 cars rolled out of the factory gates a few months ago, which is an increase of more than 26%. Passenger car numbers are boosted by a greater appetite for hybrid electric motors built in Britain. The bosses at the SMMT have said that, while there have of course been challenges around the world, manufacturers have

“defied the challenging economic backdrop to fulfil customer demand for the latest British-built models, at home and overseas,” so that manufacturing and production are indeed up.

This is a positive news story, and any opportunity we have to speak about the automotive sector should be positive, not negative or all about political point scoring. This is a serious topic and a serious industry. I know the hon. Gentleman is keen to be very ideological within the Westminster bubble, but I would suggest he steps a little outside it. I know my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), who is a champion for Toyota, which has the largest manufacturing plant in her constituency, would welcome a visit by Labour Members so they can see how the sector is booming just in her constituency. There are over 2,000 people working at the plant in South Derbyshire and involved in the supply chains, and 80% of the cars manufactured are exported to Europe. Exports are up, by the way, which I will get on to. Toyota continues to innovate and it is at the forefront of producing hybrid cars. It has been cutting emissions for over a decade and takes net zero seriously, having energy from solar panels all around the plant. The point she would want to make is, “Get out of the Westminster bubble, visit South Derbyshire, see what is happening at Toyota”—and at many other firms, as I will go on to say—“and you will see the work is going well.” Our job is to protect, promote and praise, not to talk the sector down.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): It is all very well and good talking about optimism, but does the Minister accept the reality facing the automotive industry in the UK today, and the stark warnings given by Stellantis about future job losses if the Government do not sort out the rules of origin problems?

Ms Ghani: I want to state for the record—and for the hon. Lady, who was obviously sitting there while I was speaking—that that was not optimism. Those were the facts and figures promoted not by Government, but by industry representatives. I had a meeting with Stellantis recently. We know that a number of challenges are reflected globally, not just in the UK, such as being able to recruit into the sector. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde missed another opportunity to talk about the fantastic jobs that are available. Of course, on rules of origin, that is an issue not just in the UK; it is an issue for lots of other countries that want to export and import, too.

Mark Tami: The Minister talked about the importance of the Toyota factory. In my constituency, I have the engine plant, which produces quality hybrid engines. Why are this Government opposed to hybrid engines?

Ms Ghani: This Government have a strong mandate to reach net zero and the consultation has just taken place on said mandate. The right hon. Member will know that I have been spending a lot of time with the automotive sector, including taking delegations to meet the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who will be overseeing that. My job—I also chair the Automotive Council—is to champion business, and on occasion to try to remove all the barriers it needs removed for it to manufacture more and export more. I know that the Transport Minister will be speaking more about that later.

I will get on to all points the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde raised, but he mentioned growing up in Sunderland. Just for the record—I can see there is a Birmingham MP here, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood)—I grew up in Birmingham very close to a car plant that employs many members of my family, including my brother Nasim, so this sector is very close to my heart. I have been told not to make any football jokes about Birmingham and Sunderland at this point; I will leave that for the final speech.

Matt Western: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ghani: Is it on a football point, because I will not be able to handle that? If it is not on a football point, I will take the intervention.

Matt Western: This point is not about football; it is about the debate. To pick up on the Minister’s analysis, she is correct on the statistics she gave about the UK market. She will know that we started from a pretty poor base post the pandemic and that our production was particularly hit, but other countries recovered better. It is an international market that is fighting for investment—I am sure she will accept that—and that is why it is of concern.

Ms Ghani: It is an international market that is fighting for supply chains. The SMMT was clear that, when manufacturing production was low, that was down to access to products and critical minerals, which I will come on to. As well as taking care of the industry, I am responsible for critical minerals and for supply chains. We are working with the industry, which I met just this morning, to put together a supply chain import strategy, which will be out in the autumn. We need to get a number of things right to make it even easier for the sector to do even better than it already is, but it is in a really good place and I will go on to mention some of the facts and stories about that.

The sector is indeed a jewel in the crown of our economy. It is vital, because of where it is based across the country, to supporting the levelling-up agenda, net zero and advancing global Britain. Our automotive industry employs 166,000 people, adds over £70 billion to the UK economy and is our second largest exporter of goods. The UK is proud to be home to major global manufacturers such as JLR, Nissan, Stellantis, Toyota, BMW and Ford. But that is not the whole of the UK’s automotive eco-system: we have a lot more to be proud of, from our luxury and performance sector, including Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Aston Martin, McLaren and Lotus, to heavy goods vehicles and buses, such as Leyland Trucks, Wrightbus, Alexander Dennis and Switch, as well as the future of mobility, encompassing connected

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and autonomous vehicles. Those manufacturers are supported by a diverse, resilient and growing UK supply chain that spans a wide range of components and includes companies such as Bosch, NSK, Meritor and Swindon Pressings. These are valued partnerships, and the sector knows that my Department for Business and Trade is the Government's first port of call to help businesses grow and flourish, and to create jobs, apprenticeships and opportunities around the country.

Mike Amesbury: I thank the Minister for being generous with her time. All the manufacturers that she mentioned face a cliff edge in January 2024, with the 10% tariff. What are the Government going to do about it? It is desperate in terms of those jobs in our communities.

Ms Ghani: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the rules of origin tariff. That is why we are working hard and negotiating with the EU, and working with our partner representative groups within the EU, so that they can be lobby as well. This is not just an issue in the UK. This is a European issue too, and we are making sure that those voices are heard loud and clear with our partners across Europe.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I have a specific question for clarity: have the Government formally requested a reopening of the rules of origin for 2024?

Ms Ghani: The Government are working hard to share the challenges that will be faced by all manufacturers in Europe, not just the UK, when it comes to importing and exporting vehicles. This is not just a UK issue, and it is important that not just we but our counterparts in Europe make these arguments loud and clear to the EU. I recently met SMMT and asked that its sister bodies do the same where they reside in European countries, to ensure that those arguments are heard loud and clear.

As I said, there is huge diversity of companies within the supply chain and manufacturing of all automotive vehicles, and the UK has a full automotive eco-system across the UK. The sector is here because it recognises the UK's unique strengths. Our engineers are world class—it is not for nothing that six out of a total of 10 Formula 1 teams are based in the UK. More broadly, the sector recognises that this Government have its back. We want to use innovation, skills and a competitive business environment to ensure that the UK automotive sector can thrive.

Dr Luke Evans: I am grateful to the Minister, because she alluded to the point that I was making about the automotive industry. We have talked a lot about manufacturing, but the UK is the world leader in things such as research and development, as well as in testing—autonomous testing, safety testing; we are literally the world leaders in this stuff. I mainly know that because a lot of it is based in my patch. Does the Minister agree?

Ms Ghani: I could not disagree with my hon. Friend, who is a champion for all things technology and transport, as well as for his constituency. The investment made in R&D has enabled large manufacturing firms to work closely with our academic institutions, and to de-risk

some of the technologies that are now becoming mainstream, and we continue to support that area. That leads on to my next point about the Advanced Propulsion Centre and the automotive transformation fund, which are key in us trying to de-risk and adopt new technologies to drive the sector forward.

On the Automotive Council, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said that he was engaging with the sector, but I am not quite sure where and when. A lot of the comments he made will not go down well with the sector because they were not very positive on all the work it has been doing. I engage directly with firms to see how hard they are committed to the sector, and what they expect from their politicians is support, not to be talked down.

I put on record my thanks to Graham Hoare, the current co-chair, Mike Hawes, Neville Jackson, Ian Constance, Markus Grüneisl, Paul Willcox, Murray Paul, Adrian Hallmark, Michael Leiters, Tim Slatter, Alan Johnson, Richard Kenworthy and many other indispensable members of the Automotive Council. I thank them for all the work they do, considering how challenging times have been not just for us but for our counterparts in Europe. I recently spoke at the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Trader's parliamentary reception, and I welcome its "Manifesto 2030" with its five key priorities: green automotive transformation strategy, net zero mobility, green skills, made in Britain, and powering UK clean tech. There is a lot that we agree on, and I look forward to working with the sector to try to protect and strengthen the whole automotive industry. Car companies want to innovate, and we want to support them to do so. That is why the Government have an overarching goal of making the UK a global hub for innovation, as alluded to by the my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth.

Greg Smith: In embracing that innovation—this is further to my intervention on the shadow Minister—the UK is a leader in the development of the synthetic fuel sector. By that, I do not mean fuels made from feedstocks; I mean green hydrogen merged with atmospheric carbon capture, whereby what comes out of the tailpipe is the same volume of carbon that is then recaptured to make the next load of fuel. With whole system analysis, that will be shown to be net zero, but the zero tailpipe mandate gets in the way of that. Does the Minister agree that, to embrace this innovation properly and to give an eclectic future to the automotive sector, we need to embrace those innovators as well?

Ms Ghani: We do need to embrace those innovators. One of the reasons we have so much investment in the UK in innovation and the automotive sector is that we are often first out of the door in helping to de-risk and test that technology. The Minister of State, Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire, will touch on tailings, but just last week I was at the Lower Thames Crossing, which is putting out a pitch to ensure that all vehicles on the construction site have green hydrogen. The several thousand vehicle movements on and off the site carrying freight will also have green hydrogen. The site is a port, and given the level of construction that is taking place, it may be one of the largest construction sites to get to green hydrogen first. I am not sure, but I think it is pretty well on track to being a world leader in that.

The UK-wide innovation strategy sets out our long-term plan for delivering innovation-led growth. Our primary objective is to boost private sector investment across the whole UK, creating the right conditions for all businesses to innovate, giving them confidence to do so and ensuring that we are leading the future by creating it.

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister come on to the point that I raised with my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) about the roll-out of charging points? That is an important point. People are making decisions about electric vehicles, and we want them to make the right decisions. There is an absolute dearth of charging points in my constituency and many parts of Greater Manchester, and Westminster has installed more public electric charging points than the whole north of England. The Government are asleep at the wheel. When will they wake up and do something about that?

Ms Ghani: We are topping and tailing this debate with a Transport Minister and I know he is keen to touch on charging points, but the public charging network is growing quickly, and public charging devices have more than tripled in four years, from 10,300 devices in January 2019, to more than 43,000 in June 2023. The Government expect that around 300,000 charge points will be needed as a minimum by 2030. They are being rolled out at pace, but I do not doubt there will be constituency, case-by-case charge point concerns and the Minister will reflect on those.

One concern that the SMMT and all Members of Parliament who have manufacturing plants in their constituencies regularly raise with me is access to talent. Car companies need highly skilled individuals across the entirety of their business. One reason the UK is attractive is our world-leading universities, with four UK institutions in the global top 10, according to the QS world university rankings. But that is not all. We have supported the automotive sector through the apprenticeship levy, with £2.7 billion funding by the 2024-25 financial year. That will support apprenticeships in non-levy employers, often SMEs, where the Government will continue to pay 95% of apprentice training costs.

We recognise the importance of a level playing field. That is why, at the spring Budget, the Chancellor launched a new capital allowance offer. Businesses will now benefit from full expensing, which offers 100% first-year relief to companies on qualifying new main-rate plant and machinery investments from 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2026, the 50% first-year allowance for expenditure by companies on new special rate assets until 31 March 2026, and the annual investment allowance, which provides 100% first-year relief for plant and machinery investments up to £1 million.

Due to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, energy costs have been an issue and a concern for the sector. That is why we have again intervened on behalf of the automotive sector, as well as many others, to ensure that the UK's offer is competitive. It is why the Government have implemented a range of targeted measures to ensure that energy costs for high energy intensive industries, including battery manufacturing, are in line with other major economies around the world, levelling the playing field for British companies across Europe through the British industry supercharger scheme. In addition, to take

just one example, the industrial energy transformation fund, now in its third phase, was designed to help businesses with high energy use to cut their energy bills and carbon emissions by investing in energy-efficient and low-carbon technologies. This Government announced £315 million of funding in the 2018 Budget available up to 2027.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde talked about providing confidence and support for the sector, and I want to flesh out some of the announcements he was unable to bring himself to say at the Dispatch Box in case that was put into *Hansard*. Companies continue to show confidence in the UK, and we have announced major investments across the UK, including the £1 billion from Nissan and Envision to create an EV manufacturing hub in Sunderland. I was just on the phone to Envision this morning. It is an end-to-end supply chain. We have £100 million from Stellantis for its site in Ellesmere Port, and £380 million from Ford to make Halewood its first EV components site in Europe.

Jaguar Land Rover has also announced that it will be investing £15 billion over five years into its industrial footprint as part of its move towards electrification. That is great news for the west midlands, where JLR has three production sites, research and development facilities, and its headquarters. I am hugely confident that the UK will continue to attract investments large and small to enable the EV transition and deliver green jobs. Those are the stories we should be promoting at the Dispatch Box, not playing down.

The Government recognise the concerns of the sector, and we are dealing with serious global challenges, including rising costs because of Putin's horrific war in Ukraine, supply chains disrupted by covid aftershocks and countries turning inward towards protectionism, by which, of course, I mean the Inflation Reduction Act. Acknowledging those issues, over the course of the summer I have been holding a series of business roundtables to understand exactly where the challenges in supply chains are most acute, and where the Government and businesses can work together more closely to ensure that the UK's supply chains are resilient, now and in the future.

Those headwinds have been felt across the globe, and where the UK sector has been impacted, it has not been uniquely impacted. The entire automotive sector is midway through a once-in-a-lifetime shift away from the internal combustion engine towards zero-emission vehicles. That is good not just for our net zero ambitions; it also has the potential to provide wider economic and social benefits. Of course, our competitors know that too, and the race to secure zero-emission manufacturing capacity across the world is fierce. Some countries seem willing to spend eye-watering amounts. We will be offering targeted investment in the future of the auto manufacturing sector. That means focusing on exactly where we know we are ahead of the game internationally, offering targeted and measured support that reflects the size and scale of our outstanding automotive sector.

As I have said, we have more than a chequebook to attract companies to these shores; our highly productive and skilled workforce, focus on innovation and tech and the ease of doing business are key factors in a company's decision to base itself in the UK. There is a backdrop of intensely challenging constraints on the sector globally, while the sector is undergoing a seismic technological transformation. It is clearly a difficult situation for

[Ms Ghani]

manufacturers across the world, but there are positives to be considered, especially here in the UK. The SMMT reported that UK commercial vehicle production has just had its best May performance since 2008, growing by 36.9%—I thought the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde might crack a smile for the sector—and year-to-date output is some 47.6% above the pre-pandemic levels of 2019. That is the message we want to send internationally. It clearly shows that the UK automotive sector is strong, dynamic and fundamentally capable. I want the UK to have a thriving automotive industry. As we take on these global challenges, we will take them on together with the sector.

Some mention was made of R&D support, and I will share all the work we have done. Our R&D and capital programmes delivered through the Advanced Propulsion Centre and the automotive transformation fund are positioning the UK as one of the best places in the world to design, develop and build zero-emission vehicles. They are working together to support the creation of an internationally competitive electric vehicle supply chain. In the coming months, after engagement with industry, the Government will build on those programmes to take decisive action and ensure future investment in the manufacture of zero-emission vehicles, as part of our commitment to building a cleaner, greener, more sustainable Britain fit for the world of the future, not the world of the past that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde is fixated on.

The automotive transformation fund supports the creation of an internationally competitive electric vehicle supply chain in the UK. It provides support to late-stage R&D and capital investments in strategically important technologies. That includes unlocking strategic investments in gigafactories, which I will come to, motors and drives, power electronics and fuel cell systems. Our automotive industry has a long and proud history. We are determined to build on our heritage as we invest in the technologies of the future, positioning the UK as one of the best locations in the world to manufacture electric vehicles.

I have spoken previously about the Advanced Propulsion Centre, because it does fantastic work in driving technology forward. It was founded in 2013 as a £1 billion joint venture between the automotive industry and the Government to help the industry meet the challenges of innovation and decarbonisation. It facilitates funding to UK-based research and development projects developing zero-emission technologies. The programme helps accelerate the development, commercialising and manufacture of advanced propulsion technologies in the UK. So far, it has supported 199 projects involving 450 partners. It is estimated to have supported more than 55,000 highly skilled jobs and is projected to save more than 350 million tonnes of CO₂—the equivalent of removing the lifetime emissions of 14.1 million cars.

Those projects include the setting up of a joint venture between Unipart and Williams Advanced Engineering to manufacture batteries in Coventry, Danfoss setting up a centre of excellence for hydraulic R&D at its plant in Scotland, and Equipmake increasing the size of its manufacturing plant in Norfolk to meet demand for its electric drive unit. That shows how much work can be delivered and how many jobs created if we work with industry and help it de-risk in adopting new technologies.

I recently visited the Warwick Manufacturing Group, which the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde alluded to. I am surprised he did not applaud the work further.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): He did.

Ms Ghani: He could have gone further.

I saw at first hand the cutting-edge future mobility research being done in Coventry, the birthplace of British motor manufacturing. While in Coventry, I also had the opportunity to attend the Advanced Propulsion Centre to discuss how we can build on the success of our existing R&D and capital investment programmes. During the visit I met year 6 pupils from Templars Primary School in Coventry who attended the Advanced Propulsion Centre's STEM day. That is a prime example of outreach activity to inspire the next generation of automotive engineers.

We cannot talk about the automotive sector without thinking about the broader supply chain and one of my particular passions, critical minerals, which I am surprised the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde did not spend more time discussing. He missed out the key point of what is needed to produce electric vehicles. We know that China dominates the EV market, partly due to its grip on the supply chain. It controls much of the mining of crucial raw materials, and 80% of battery making for EVs is controlled by Chinese firms. It is also the world's top car exporter.

I am not sure whether the hon. Member has had time to read Ed Conway's recent book, "Material World", which makes some key points on lithium. We know that reserves of the metal are concentrated in a handful of nations. In his book, he said that lithium reserves are concentrated in "a handful of nations", so that "while the rest of the world panics about China's dominance of the battery supply chain, many in Beijing are simultaneously panicking about China's reliance on the rest of the world's raw materials."

We know that an EV car battery contains 40 kg of lithium, 10 kg of cobalt, 10 kg of manganese and 40 kg of nickel, and that is before we consider the graphite that goes into the anode. Those materials have to come from somewhere, which is why we updated our critical minerals strategy in the "Critical Minerals Refresh"—[*Interruption.*] That was a positive noise from the hon. Member—to ensure we were supporting the sector through the whole supply chain. I encourage colleagues to read Ed Conway's book. I am not on commission, by the way; it is just a good read.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde talked about not having a strategy, but we are working with industry to make sure it can plan for the future. To do that, we had the "Critical Minerals Refresh", which came from the integrated review. We are making sure that we are focused on batteries and the EV supply chain here in the UK. Recent good news that the hon. Member also forgot to mention is the joint venture between British Lithium and Imerys, announced on 29 June. That is a massive boost to the critical minerals supply chain in the UK.

By the end of the decade, the development of Cornwall as the UK's leading lithium hub will supply enough lithium carbonate for 500,000 electric cars a year. To help secure the supply of critical minerals, the Government

have not only refreshed our critical minerals strategy, but put in place a task and finish group to work with industry so that it can highlight its particular vulnerabilities and we can provide it with the confidence and resilience it needs in its supply chains.

Most recently, I visited Indonesia, where I met Indonesian Ministers to emphasise that the UK has a lot to offer on critical minerals, particularly in relation to private finance, environmental, social and governance capabilities, and mining services. I also visited key mine sites and met companies that are critical in the battery supply chain and in critical mineral production, including some innovative UK companies showcasing the best of British—I know that sentence would be hard for the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde ever to put on the record.

This year, I have also visited South Africa, where I represented the UK at the Minerals Security Partnership ministerial meeting and confirmed the UK's intention to host the next such meeting during London Metal Exchange Week in October. I also visited Canada, where I signed the UK-Canada critical minerals statement of intent and launched our critical minerals dialogue with Canada, forging a key partnership with one of the most important global players in the critical minerals ecosystem. The hon. Member will want to have a moment to reflect on and applaud our work internationally and domestically on critical minerals.

Jonathan Reynolds: Any other countries?

Ms Ghani: So many—too many to list right now.

We also need to look at battery recycling. We want to create a regulatory space that supports the appropriate treatment of EV batteries. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is currently reviewing existing UK batteries legislation and working at pace to publish a consultation in the second half of 2023. We have also funded the Faraday battery challenge, which has enabled research into the safe and efficient segregation and repurposing of EV battery cell components. Altium is exploring how to recover the critical metals from old EV batteries and process them effectively so that they can be reused in new batteries. Reblend aims to develop the core processes and capabilities for a UK-based automotive battery recycling industry that can recover cathode materials from production scrap and end-of-life automotive and consumer batteries for reuse in automotive batteries going forward. We are not only trying to get close to host countries and make sure that we are mining ethically, but seeing how we can ensure that we are recycling batteries.

The Minister of State at the Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire, will touch on a few issues about the zero-emission vehicle mandate, so I will quickly touch on rules of origin. To support the transition, we must not only champion innovation but address all barriers to trade with partners and markets all over the world. Our closest trading partner is of course the EU, with whom we share not only climate goals and a trajectory towards electrification, but deeply integrated supply chains. More than 50% of cars manufactured in the UK and exported are destined for EU consumers. For those reasons, I am working closely with the industry to address its concerns about planned changes to the rules of origin for electric vehicles in the trade and co-operation agreement between the UK and EU.

Since signing the deal, unforeseen and shared supply chain shocks have hit the auto industry hard. That has driven up the cost of raw materials and battery components, making it harder to meet the changing rules. That risks industry on both sides facing tariffs on electric vehicles at a crucial time in the transition to electrification. I am determined to seek a solution to this shared problem and will work with the EU to fix it for 2024. The Prime Minister has raised the issue directly with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and I and other Ministers are engaging with our EU counterparts. We will continue to work closely with industry to address any and all blockers to the electric transition so that our great UK auto industry continues to benefit from access to global markets and UK consumers have the best possible options as we make the switch to electric vehicles.

I wanted to touch on hydrogen, but I believe I am running out of time. I was also going to reflect on success in the aerospace sector, which is very much linked to the automotive sector, but I will not because I can see that you would like me to conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. For the sake of clarity, there is plenty of time for the debate and the hon. Lady can take as long as she wants. She has so far held the floor for 32 minutes. It is not for me to judge how long she ought to speak for; it is for her to judge the mood of the House.

Ms Ghani: Well, I think the mood of the House is to be more positive about the automotive sector. I could list even more stories, but I will conclude because I believe that Opposition Members would despair about all the positivity about the automotive sector that we could talk about and reflect on.

We are home to more than 25 manufacturers that build more than 70 different vehicles in the UK, all of which are supported by 2,500 component providers and some of the world's most skilled engineers. It is incredibly important to reflect how difficult it has been for the automotive sector globally, but of course we have huge success stories here in the UK. In 2022 we exported vehicles to more than 130 different countries and built more than three quarters of a million cars, with the onwads trajectory rising year on year. This is a healthy sector going above and beyond not only to reskill and upskill, but to meet net zero targets.

The Government are supporting the UK automotive industry, and the sector is a stalwart example of innovation and dynamism to the rest of the world. It is a great sector to get into, whether someone joins it as an apprentice or even by taking on a regular job. Of course, there is more to do. There are more opportunities to secure as we transition to zero-emission vehicles and we realise the potential of connected and autonomous mobility. We have already achieved a great deal in partnership with this fantastic sector, but we are determined to do more. We work with the sector—we do not sit in Westminster coming up with plans that we then U-turn on—and that has given the sector the confidence it needs to continue to invest in the UK. The job of those representing the sector is to praise, promote and protect, not to talk the sector down.

Jonathan Reynolds: And to deliver.

Ms Ghani: Delivery is based on the investment I have reflected on throughout my speech. I look forward to hearing lots of sensible speeches throughout the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the SNP spokesman.

1.46 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I had ample cause to reflect as I listened to the Minister's speech, replete with positivity as it was, that there are probably not all that many electric vehicles on the market that could not have been charged up to about 80% in the time the Minister was on her feet. I wondered whether she was looking to give her name to a standard unit of measurement that we might adopt for such an infusion of charge into a vehicle.

The debate is of course about an industrial strategy, or the lack thereof. While I was preparing for the debate, I had the opportunity to stumble over a few of the various iterations of industrial strategy we have had under Conservative Governments past and present. We had one called "Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future" dating from 2017, which in most respects seemed to be a pretty conventional industrial strategy in what it set out to achieve and the sectors it sought to develop to do that. That was of course replaced by something called "Build Back Better" under the unlamented premiership of the former Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, which notably promised an "open and dynamic economy" and "World-class knowledge and research", all the while the Government seemed determined to cut us off from our largest competitors and closest market. It promised

"A stable framework for growth and strong institutions"

and boasted of "low, stable inflation", which sounds somewhat risible after the experience of the past few months. It also promised levelling-up in terms of people and places, despite the fact that we have seen a significant lack of transparency in the allocations made through that funding stream. I suggest that those allocations will do nothing to recalibrate the grossly disproportionate imbalances of wealth and life opportunities across the nations and regions of these islands.

That takes us to the automotive industry. In many ways, it is something of a surprise that there still is one. Part of the deeply held mythology of the Conservatives in terms of the shape of the post-1979 UK is a tale they like to tell of industrial dysfunction and poor industrial relations. While that certainly took its toll on the automotive industry, I think it is the general lack of care that we have shown for manufacturing and the economic vandalism inflicted over that period as services were esteemed over manufacturing that makes the continued existence of our mass automotive sector in the UK a near miracle. That is not just as a result of the general lack of respect for manufacturing; there was also the general economic policy.

Since being elected to this place, I have always tried to talk more about the future of the North sea oil and gas fields than about their past mismanagement. Successive Governments, Conservative and Labour, were desperate to get the oil and gas pumping as quickly as they could, to reduce the crippling balance of payments deficit. The result was to push up the value of sterling beyond

anything sustainable, which made manufacturing exports uncompetitive. Together with what we might call the policy of sado-monetarism that was imposed with high interest rates, manufacturing was driven down even further and unemployment was allowed to spiral later in the decade to above 3 million, leaving scars in the form of decades of lost opportunities and diminished life chances.

Although automotive production rallied later in the decade thanks to significant overseas investment, in recent years those concerns have re-emerged. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has reported that manufacturing decreased every year from 2016 to 2022. I hear what the Minister says about the positive trend of the past four months, but there is a longer-term trend over the past six years that cannot simply be wished away because of the past few weeks. In that time, a number of UK-based manufacturers have announced UK plant closures or reductions in capacity.

Greening the automotive industry will be a key element in the green transition. Personal transportation will be here for good, so it is imperative that we seize fully the industrialising of our green opportunities. We have touched on the importance of gigafactories. Batteries are heavy things by their nature, because of the materials that go into their production. There are lots of regulations on their transport, particularly cross-border. They are hazardous to transport over long distances due to their flammability. That means that there will be a strong incentive to ensure that EV manufacturing is located relatively close to where batteries are manufactured—probably in the same country and region.

For all the promises of factories, Britishvolt and the potential of gigafactories here, the UK is at risk of falling even further behind Europe in battery manufacturing. Capacity in continental Europe is expected to reach nearly 450 GWh by 2030. That is simply dwarfing the scale of the ambition, never mind the scale of delivery, that we are likely to see over the next few years. If those batteries are made in Europe or Asia, there is a simple decision that vehicle manufacturers can take about where to build the electric vehicles of the future.

All that is compounded by rules of origin. The new post-Brexit rules that come into effect in January 2024 will place 10% tariffs on exports of electric cars between the UK and the EU, if at least 45% of their value does not originate in the UK or the EU. We have heard about Stellantis, the world's fourth largest car manufacturer, which has warned that the commitment to make electric vehicles in the UK is in serious jeopardy unless the Government can negotiate a deal to maintain existing trade rules until at least 2027, to give them a chance to adapt.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I looked at Labour's Opposition day motion; is my hon. Friend as surprised as me that it does not mention Brexit anywhere?

Richard Thomson: I was very surprised about that. It seems to be the elephant in the room, and of this discussion. If my hon. Friend is patient, I will come to that towards the end of my speech.

Not just Stellantis makes such warnings; they have been echoed by Jaguar Land Rover and Ford, which have said that if the cost of EV manufacturing in the

UK becomes uncompetitive and unsustainable, operations will close. Mike Hawes, the chief executive of the SMMT, warned at a summit recently:

“We can’t afford to have a last minute, 31 December agreement, because business needs to plan its volumes.”

Andrew Graves, a car expert at the University of Bath has warned of dire consequences of the industry, noting:

“you will start to lose the whole of the UK industry, not just Vauxhall and a couple of other manufacturers...it really makes no industrial sense to locate in the United Kingdom.”

The UK Government’s lack of action to ensure that the UK has the capacity to build batteries necessary for EU production—coupled with Brexit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) rightly raised—has made it virtually impossible for domestic UK production to help us meet our targets on CO₂ emissions. As Mike Hawes said:

“We urgently need an industrial strategy that creates attractive investment conditions and positions the UK as one of the best places in the world for advanced automotive manufacturing.”

That must be a priority for the UK Government, but I do not see any indication beyond warm words that it is. To quote someone else who might know what they are talking about, Andy Palmer, former chief operating officer at Nissan and chairman of battery start-ups InoBat and Ionetic, has warned that

“we are running out of time”

to get battery manufacturing up and running in the UK, and that the failure to address the issues also caused by Brexit could lead to 800,000 jobs lost in the UK—basically those associated with the car industry.

Gavin Newlands: On job losses, Madam Deputy Speaker you will remember as well as I do the impact of the closure of Linwood car plant on the town. Many would say that Linwood has still not fully recovered from that closure, when thousands of workers were put on the scrapheap. Is my hon. Friend worried about what will happen to places such as Sunderland and Ellesmere Port if the Government do not get a grip?

Richard Thomson: I share my hon. Friend’s concern. [*Interruption.*] There is some sedentary chuntering—if the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) gives me a chance to respond to the intervention, I will gladly give way to him if he has a substantive point to make. We can still see the industrial scars of the devastation reaped by the sudden closure of the Linwood factory in 1981. What we do not see quite so readily but is still every bit as debilitating is the impact on families who lose opportunities to participate fully in the economy. There is a very high price associated with getting this wrong, which goes far beyond simply not seeing factories on greenfield sites.

The motion speaks about a lack of a meaningful UK industrial strategy, which is a fair accusation. It calls for the need to

“urgently resolve the rules of origin changes”

that are looming in 2024. At this point, I am bound to observe that both Labour and the Conservatives make grandiloquent promises about how each would seek to harness the power of the British state to transform the economy and, with it, the lives and opportunities that follow. For the two years in every three over the last

century that the Conservatives have had power, or the one year in every three that Labour has had power, neither has done that.

I mentioned the various iterations of Conservative industrial strategy; I have read Labour’s industrial strategy, which carries the signature and many photographs of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds). In many ways it is a very fine document, but when it comes to the impact of rules of origin, as with much else, a position promising to make Brexit work means absolutely nothing. I say this as gently as possible: Brexit can never be made to work, either in its current form or in any conceivable variant. As long as making Brexit work is part of the strategy, no matter which party it belongs to—Labour or the Conservatives—it will be left with a slow puncture.

Jonathan Reynolds: Will the hon. Member give way on that point?

Richard Thomson: I was coming to the end of my remarks, but I will give way since I mentioned the hon. Member.

Jonathan Reynolds: I understand the strength of feeling on that point and how, when we have this conversation, many will revert to that Brexit argument. However, I ask the hon. Gentleman to recognise not the political case but the economic one: we have the lowest business investment in the G7 under this Conservative Government. We want to provide a stable platform for that investment to increase in gigafactories, R&D, hydrogen and all the things we want to see, but reopening that debate—and the independence debate—is not the stable way to realise those opportunities in future. If we spend all our time doing that, we will find that other countries get to a point that we will never be able to catch up with, because we did not focus on the real opportunities at hand.

Richard Thomson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I could not disagree more. This is not a stable platform. The Conservatives are offering us the stability of decline, and it seems that Labour is embracing that for fear of frightening its former voters in the red wall. It seeks to get them back not with honesty, but by telling people what it thinks they want to hear. It should have the intellectual honesty to recognise that the real debilitating impact on securing future growth opportunities is not from the issue he mentions, but from the barriers that have been imposed. To hear that Labour intends to further padlock them in place will depress a great many people the length and breadth not just of Scotland but, looking at opinion polling, far beyond.

I regret to say that although the motion contains many fine words—it is certainly a fine document in many respects from Labour—while it remains saddled to the Brexit the Conservatives have given us, it will not do anything to tackle the fundamental problems it diagnoses.

2 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I rise to speak in this debate because it is called “Supporting the Automotive Industry”. With the sense of humility that the Opposition asked for, I read the motion. It states:

[Dr Luke Evans]

“this House recognises that the automotive industry is the jewel in the crown of British manufacturing and believes it can have a bright future creating good jobs for people across the UK”.

Then it falls apart, because it states that it

“regrets that after 13 years of Conservative neglect the UK risks losing this world-class industry”.

I thought, gosh, as a matter of humility, have I missed something? What have the Opposition been talking about that I have so obviously missed? So I thought I would do a quick search on *Hansard* to see when the automotive industry has been talked about. The Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), has mentioned it once since 2015, and that was when he was quoting my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) confirming that the automotive sector was ready for Brexit. The shadow Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), has never uttered the words “automotive industry” in *Hansard*. To be fair, the shadow Secretary of State leading the debate, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), has mentioned it six times, so once every two years, which is really useful to note.

Jonathan Reynolds: I am sorry, but that is not credible. Was the hon. Gentleman in the Chamber for the urgent question when Britishvolt, the flagship automotive battery policy, fell apart? Was he there when Stellantis gave evidence to the Select Committee or when we asked two urgent questions? On both occasions, the Government objected to us using Parliament to raise those important issues, so I am afraid I do not find his position credible.

Dr Evans: That will lead me on to what I want to talk about, which is the positive side of this. Britishvolt wanted to have its headquarters in my constituency, and I met it to see what would happen. The Government protected £100 million of British taxpayers’ money. If that had gone to the wrong place, the shadow Secretary of State would have been at the Dispatch Box lambasting the Government for frittering away taxpayers’ money, so I will take no lectures on that point.

I am here to talk about the positive side of the automotive industry. In the east midlands, we are very proud of what we have to offer in the manufacturing industry. It has been through a tough time for the past 50 or 60 years, but we are making real progress. Only recently, Bosworth was noted as a net zero hotspot and described as

“connected areas with concentrated net zero activity, where businesses create jobs and add to the local hotspot’s economy”.

That means better paid jobs, better opportunities locally, better local businesses and, nationally, 840,000 jobs. Within that context, the average wage for someone in the industry is £42,600, compared with the national average of £33,000.

What does that look like in reality on the ground? That is what I want to spend a few minutes talking about. On Monday, I was at a place called Horiba MIRA. For those who do not know it, imagine the silicon valley of the automotive industry. Imagine the Google complex of anything to do with the car industry. From designing to manufacturing to testing, it all happens

in this one space. It is unique in the world in what it can do. It was supported by Government from 2010 all the way through, with investment to grow as an enterprise zone, and was then allowed to flourish and attract international investment from the likes of REE, an Israeli company, bringing hundreds of millions of pounds in and bringing 300 jobs with it.

That is just a start in describing what is going in the automotive industry. I agree with those on both sides of the House who have said that this really is a revolutionary opportunity. Everyone in the world is trying to work out the best way to take it, and the best way is to support our research going on right here, including in happening in my constituency. MIRA Technology Park has over 600 high-value jobs, with specialisms in anything from autonomous car driving to battery technology, road safety and defence. Those technologies are all being tested right here in the UK. In November 2022, Horiba MIRA’s assured connected autonomous vehicle testing won the test facility of the year prize at the *Vehicle Dynamics International* awards, based on innovation in products, teams and technology. In June 2023, MIRA won an award from Jaguar Land Rover at its seventh annual global supplier excellence awards, demonstrating outstanding achievements in JLR’s global supply based on “customer love unity, integrity, growth, impact.”

That all sounds very good, but when I ask my constituents whether they are aware of what is going on in our constituency, they do not really know what MIRA is. That is part of why I am so pleased to speak in this debate, because actually the UK is fantastically good in this space. It is not just about creating jobs—at MIRA, someone can go from being an apprentice all the way through to a PhD level qualification on cybersecurity in cars. It is also innovating for the future to get to net zero and create energy security. It has been partnered by local enterprise partnerships, investment zones and the Midlands Engine to help drive investment, change policy and bring inward investment from the international community.

On Monday, I was very proud to welcome the president of Horiba, Mr Horiba. We saw two things: the research it is doing with Ceres on hydrogen battery technology to allow us to have battery technology in houses and vehicles; and driving simulators. If someone wants to break into the industry and is designing a car, they can now use a simulator to test how it will handle, what it will look like, and how it will feel in terms of comfort and safety. All that can be done simply in a computer-generated room, which takes out the need to make 50 to 100 prototypes and collapses it down to about one or two. But Horiba does not just have dark rooms with TV screens—there is an entire race track to test every single condition one can think of that a car might need to go through. That is right here in our country, leading the world on the international stage on how to bring in investment. I am really pleased that we can talk about that.

There is more in my constituency. We have Triumph Motorcycles. For those who do not know, Steve McQueen leapt away on a Triumph motorcycle. James Bond was seen going over the rooftops on a Triumph motorcycle. I am very proud to have Triumph Motorcycles’ headquarters in my patch, creating over 1,000 jobs. In the last three years, it has broken records for the number of bikes it has sold, which has gone up by 30% across the world.

All across America and into Latin America, it is breaking into the industry and the market. That means high-end innovative jobs designed and manufactured right here in my constituency. This is the kind of thing that Members on both sides of the House are not good enough at talking up and talking about. That level of innovation and finishing makes a huge difference to my local community.

I want to mention two other businesses. Flying Spares, based in Market Bosworth, is a second-hand remodelling firm for cars such as Rolls-Royces. If someone need a part, it will ship it anywhere across the world. That is an innovative way of creating longevity and helping achieve net zero by recycling our high-end products. JJ Churchills is a fantastic advanced manufacturing aeronautical and defence agency, which employs 110 people, with high-end apprenticeships, in the middle of the countryside. This is happening right in my constituency—it is 85% rural, yet I have businesses like that.

The final jewel in the crown is Caterpillar, which last year made £59 billion worth of sales worldwide. The company, which has 1,000 people working in Desford in my constituency, is looking at making green hydrogen-fuelled electric tractors, forklift trucks, dumper trucks—you name it. I have had the pleasure of sitting there and driving Caterpillar vehicles in Arizona remotely. That is the sort of innovation that we can do. Caterpillar is sourcing its manufacturing right here in Desford, and has been for 70 years.

I mention all this to highlight some of what is going on in my small area of Leicestershire. People choose the UK because of the skillsets we have, the tech environment we create, the regulation we have in place and our stability in the global market. That is why they come here. Does that mean we should shut up shop, because we have done enough? No, of course not. It is important to make sure that there are signposts and avenues so that people know where to invest. When I speak to the likes of the Midlands Engine, which is looking for ways to drive investment in the 11 million people in its area, among the questions that come up are: where should businesses go, and how do they connect with Government?

Gavin Newlands: The hon. Member is trying manfully to paint an extraordinarily positive picture of the industry, but does he not think that the rules of origin and Brexit will have a negative impact on the automotive sector? Yes or no?

Dr Evans: If that was the case, Triumph would have struggled, but it has not.

A fundamental point has not been concentrated on enough. I am danger of straying into the territory of my Department, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, but the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who is no longer in her place, raised the subject of infrastructure. It does not matter what we are discussing, be it wind, EVs, power generation or gigafactories; unless we sort the grid out there will be a fundamental difficulty. I believe that, broadly speaking, the UK is five years ahead in delivering on net zero. The problem is that so many companies are coming forward that they simply cannot be connected. I ask the Minister to speak to his colleagues in the Government to make sure that we deal with infrastructure. I know a report is coming out this month on the grid and how we can take it forward.

My final plea goes to Members in all parts of the House of Commons. Please come to my constituency of Bosworth and see just how marvellous our automotive industry is. From design to manufacturing to testing at the highest world standards, we have it all right here in Bosworth. You are more than welcome to join me.

2.13 pm

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak in this debate as one of the very few fully apprenticed trained engineers in this House. Birmingham and the west midlands have been the beating heart of manufacturing for the whole country and we want that to continue.

Jaguar Land Rover is a huge company in a constituency neighbouring my own. In my constituency, I have Bracebridge Engineering Ltd, specialists in metal fabrication and sheet metal work; P&B Metal Components, which supplies the automotive and aerial industries; Coker Engineering, which offers CNC turning, milling and grinding and assembly; Dana UK Axles, supplier of car parts to JLR; and many other manufacturers. I am particularly proud to have IMI Truflo Marine, the most revered experts and the best manufacturer of valves for submarines—the only one in the world—doing fantastic work in my constituency. We also have Fracino, whose coffee machines are better than most Italian-made ones and are supplied to most of the coffee houses in this country. The company was set up by an Italian family based in my constituency and does fantastic work.

The issue I really want to talk about today is training and apprenticeships, because I also have in my constituency the Engineering Employers' Federation training school. I opened the centre 10 years ago, since when it has grown fourfold. The Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), has visited twice to see the great work being done there. His predecessor, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), also visited. If the Minister wishes to come, I will be happy to guide her around.

The EEF training centre is a serious organisation that works very hard to produce apprenticeships. EEF members in Birmingham pay for their apprentices to go there, where they are taught to level 3 and to graduate level, too. I ask the Government to look at how to provide capital support to the EEF training school and colleges across Birmingham and the west midlands, and across the country, so that they can buy the sort of equipment they need—CNC machines, sheet metal equipment and so on—to train people properly. I have too many colleges unable to provide such training because they do not have the capital they need for equipment. To support the industry we have and to get the industry we want, we need to support apprenticeships, whether people train at EEF or other colleges in my constituency and elsewhere.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) and others have rightly raised the issue of charging points, as well as our lack of battery manufacturing capacity. I think we should also be looking at our capacity to enable connection to the grid. At the moment, those who want to supply energy—solar, wind or any other sort—to the grid face a 10-year waiting list. I know that you are shocked to hear that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am sure that others are

[Mr Khalid Mahmood]

too. To reach the levels of charging points and battery manufacture the UK needs to support a huge increase in EV manufacturing, we have to resolve that. All of us want better-engineered vehicles to save future generations from poisonous gas emissions. To do that, people need to be able to connect to the grid to power those charging points, but they cannot do so now and will not be able to in the foreseeable future, not for 10 years. I ask the Minister to speak to whoever is in charge of that, to make the case, because this is a huge need for the whole industry.

Dr Luke Evans: The hon. Member is absolutely right. As a Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, I am acutely aware of those issues. I know that the Government put in place a Minister for the grid to look at that side of things. I believe that very soon a report will come out, which I am hopeful will answer the UK's questions about connecting to the grid.

Mr Mahmood: I thank the hon. Member for making that point. I would like to discuss with him the new industries that want to come in and do that, but rather than a report, I want to see some action and delivery. The country cannot wait another 10 years.

Triumph used to manufacture at a factory in Small Heath in Birmingham, where my father used to work. He was a setter-operator on a lathe that produced Triumphs in my constituency. The British industry was then taken over by lots of imports from Japan—we were not able to compete—but I am glad that British industry is now able to compete. That is what I want for the future of the British engineering and manufacturing industry: for us to be able to compete in those areas so that we can show the world that we are the world leaders.

Dana in my constituency is very competitive in the motor vehicle industry. It supplies axles and other engineering components to the car industry. I want continued support for Dana and for it to have more apprentices and to be able to move forward. The key issue is skills, skills and more skills. Unless we get those skills, we will not be able to do what we want.

About six or seven years ago, Truflo did not have the capacity. It kept on members of staff until they were 70, rather than them retiring. Truflo then worked with the University of Birmingham to get apprentices on board to close the gap and get engineers to work for the company. It is the only valve company that works to the quality required to work in submarines—once a submarine is underwater, if it does not have the best equipment, it becomes very serious.

We have a great industry in the west midlands and we have great people doing great work. All I want is to ensure that in this debate we discuss the issue of engineering and manufacturing, so that we can move forward and see how we can deliver. I would like the Minister to follow through on that, and perhaps we can discuss some of the issues afterwards.

The real issue is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said, that we need to get British industry working, and we need to work together to move forward. That can be done by the engineering and

manufacturing sector. Green energy relies on the engineering and manufacturing sector. We do not want to have to import wind turbines; we can make them in the UK. We can make solar energy and hydrogen energy in the UK, and so we should. Let us enable the people in our industry to move forward on these issues. Let us support our industry and move forward.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. You know that I have another appointment very soon, so I will terminate my speech at this point. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde has introduced a fantastic and much-needed debate so that we can discuss this important issue.

2.21 pm

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): My constituency of Llanelli has made a huge contribution to the automotive industry over many years. Industry grew up there from the very early days of smelting iron ore with local coal, to smelting copper ore imported through the town's docks, and on to the world-famous tinplate industry, which lives on in the Tata works, which are often referred to as steelworks but which are referred to locally as the tinplate works.

Given its metal tradition, it is no wonder that motor manufacturing and engineering flourished in Llanelli and have been and continue to be very important sources of employment. As well as the larger firms, such as Marelli and Gestamp, there are myriad smaller firms, such as Excel Precision Engineering. They all produce a range of components that are part of the immensely complex supply chain that supplies the many iconic names in the UK motor industry. So many jobs in Llanelli depend on motor manufacturing and, indeed, across Wales there are some 9,000 jobs in the industry.

The complex supply chain makes it vital that the Government have a clear industrial strategy and trade policy, to give the industry the long-term certainty that it needs to invest. We are already seeing the effects of the Government's dilly-dallying, with production down nearly 10% in 2022 and exports down 14%, which equates to a significant amount when eight out of 10 vehicles are exported. This means empty order books in the supply chain, which is very worrying for workers.

This is about not just the need to produce huge volumes of car batteries but adapting the design of many of the component parts of vehicles, with investment to gear up production lines to produce them. Furthermore, as petrol and diesel cars are phased out, some components will no longer be needed. To survive, the factories that make them will need to transition to manufacturing relevant components for the future, which is a future of electric vehicles.

Just in case the Government still have not heard the message coming loud and clear from the industry for months and months, the challenges are: high energy prices; rules of origin; the need for a long-term industrial strategy and certainty about the future; support for research and development; and the enormous challenge posed by the way other countries incentivise the industry to site new factories and new production lines in their countries.

Let us look at some of the asks. First, I implore the Government, instead of pressing ahead with the imposition of 10% tariffs from January 2024, to work together with

the EU to postpone the escalation of the rules of origin requirements until 2027. We also need the Government to support research and development and the bringing of innovation to the market. For example, my constituents have a company that has developed the means to make an EV car battery 15% more efficient. That could make a huge improvement by getting more miles out of a vehicle per charge or facilitating less weighty batteries. That is the sort of enterprise that we need to support.

India is an associate member of the Horizon programme, yet staff in our universities still do not know whether their projects will be able to go ahead. They do not know whether we will continue to be part of the Horizon programme. The Government need to clarify that as soon as possible, so that we do not lose excellent researchers who will go elsewhere if they cannot further their research here in the UK.

Manufacturers have pointed out time and again that the UK has much higher energy prices than our competitor countries. This affects not only energy-intensive industry but all manufacturing. The solution is clear, and Labour has plans to implement it. We on the Labour Benches recognise the real urgency of the need to invest significantly in renewable energy. That is precisely what we would prioritise so that we could slash bills for industry and households while creating jobs—as well as, of course, tackling climate change and ensuring our energy security so that we are never again held to ransom by a foreign despot increasing gas prices. Instead, we have seen the Conservative Government ban the expansion of wind energy in England and take a half-hearted approach to lifting the ban, stalling on solar and, quite frankly, desperately underperforming on the roll-out of renewable energy over the past few years.

We then come to the huge amount of investment that is needed now to transform production from petrol and diesel vehicles to electric vehicles. The US Inflation Reduction Act is a massive game changer. The EU has responded by developing its own incentives, but we have still not had a coherent response from this Government. Time is running out, because companies are making decisions now, and once they ramp up the production of electric vehicles elsewhere, we will see workers in factories here left with nothing but finishing off the remaining orders on existing lines, with no future. If, once those decisions are made, companies do invest elsewhere, there will be no bringing them back: once they have gone, they have gone, adding to the loss of 37% of UK motor manufacturing jobs that this Conservative Government have presided over. That is a full third of the industry lost since 2010. Although I welcome any new investment, it really does need to be put into the context of what this Government have allowed us to lose.

We are all aware of the urgent need to establish battery factories here in the UK. Germany has clocked up 10 factories, while we are struggling on one. What are the Government going to do to ensure that we get the battery factories we need, and in a timely fashion? It is no good being too late when all the industry has gone elsewhere.

In addition, we need adaptation and transformation right across the industry. That is why we in the Labour party have set out our plan to implement a proper industrial strategy and establish an industrial council to provide long-term stability of policy. We have also set

out our UK version of the US Inflation Reduction Act: our green prosperity plan. Our national wealth fund will, when needed, provide the finance to invest in the transformation of our automotive industry to produce EVs, which are an important part of our plans to get to net zero. We will boost UK battery capacity with the part-financing of eight additional gigafactories and accelerate the roll-out of charging points to give providers confidence to charge their EVs.

To reiterate, it is not simply the Labour party but the whole industry that is very concerned that we are not seeing a clear industrial strategy or the necessary moves to build battery factories by incentivising firms to continue putting their production here, by bringing down energy prices and by ensuring that we have a thriving motor manufacturing industry for the future.

2.30 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), who is right to talk about the importance of innovation and enterprise in this sector.

This is an important debate, which is why it is disappointing that there are now more Government Parliamentary Private Secretaries in the Chamber than there have been Conservative speakers in this debate. The public and workers will question why the Tories think so little of the automotive sector and will draw their own conclusions.

I am pleased that parliamentary time has been given today to focus on the automotive industry, which has a long and proud history in the UK. As we have already heard, from Sunderland to Coventry, Ellesmere Port and Luton, industrial cities and towns across the country have been hallmarks of manufacturing and quality production in our automotive sector for decades.

My constituents in Luton North have a particular interest in this debate. In a moment I will address the recent events at the SKF plant at Sundon Park in my constituency, but first I would like to discuss another automotive crisis facing the Luton community. Luton's Vauxhall plant is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins). She is a champion for the automotive sector, and I wish the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) had looked up how many times she has mentioned the automotive sector and industry, as he would have reached double digits for sure.

Vauxhall has been a proud industrial landmark of our town since 1905. The plant played a major part in the war effort during the 1940s, producing the Churchill tank and becoming a centre for repairing battle-damaged tanks. Thousands of Bedford lorries were turned out at Kimpton Road, including the QL, which was the company's first four-wheel drive vehicle and a key feature of our country's military fleet.

If we fast forward to the present day, we see that the Luton Vauxhall plant employs around 1,500 people from across our town and has been essential to creating skilled, unionised local jobs, running apprenticeship schemes for young people and fostering local talent, including across supply chains and other local businesses. The plant now specialises in producing vans, around 70% of which are exported to mainland Europe. I am so pleased to have had the pleasure of visiting the plant with my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South to

[Sarah Owen]

meet the workers, and we saw how proud they are of what they turn out. Long may it continue, in the face of the challenge from this Tory Government.

Businesses such as Vauxhall not only provide jobs to people in Luton North, they are also intrinsic to our identity as a town. Generations have worked there, known each other and grown together. Automation changed the face and size of Britain's automotive sector but, as quickly as we saw it rise, we are now sadly seeing it decline.

Thirteen years of Tory chaos have turbo-charged the closure of factories and the destruction of workers' livelihoods. The Conservatives' disastrous handling of Brexit negotiations, the explosion of the economy by the previous Conservative Prime Minister and the long abandonment of any semblance of an industrial strategy are just a few of many contributing factors.

Locally, even in the face of the Government's evolving mess, we have seen a committed, quality automotive sector and supply chain in Luton, but it is now hanging by a thread. The Minister talked about optimism, but this is the reality facing thousands of workers across the country. Other jobs linked to manufacturing, the automotive industry and the supply chain are similarly under threat.

SKF is a major employer in my constituency. SKF is a ball bearing manufacturing plant, formerly closely tied to Volvo. SKF, like Vauxhall, has been a proud feature of Luton for more than 100 years, and it is another prime example of how this Government are sitting on their hands while they oversee the slow, managed decline of manufacturing in this country.

Last month, SKF announced its plan to close the Luton plant and move production to Poznan in Poland by the end of 2024. This is a devastating blow to our town and our local economy, and it could see the loss of up to 300 jobs. I went to meet workers and Unite union reps at SKF, and they are all deeply concerned about the sudden closure. They told me that, throughout covid, they were considered key workers. They operated and worked throughout, putting their safety behind production, for the good of the company and for the good of the economy.

Generations have worked at SKF in Sundon Park, and thousands have given their best working days to that business, only for SKF's board members to turn their back on them and for this Government to turn their back on manufacturing workers again. Seriously, what do the Government want? A land of Amazons? A blanket of windowless storage warehouses, where people compete and break themselves to meet unrealistic and ever-increasing pick rates? That is what they are turning our country into.

I am pleased the Minister was keen to take up invites to visit Members' constituencies, so will she please commit to meeting me and workers at SKF who face losing their jobs to see how we can save SKF's future in Luton?

Ms Ghani: I recently had a meeting with the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) and Stellantis, and I am always open to meeting colleagues on both sides of the Chamber. Of course I will meet the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), those employees and Unite the union.

Sarah Owen: I thank the Minister for giving that commitment. It will mean a lot to the workers of SKF and to the constituency and the wider economy.

Long-standing businesses with ties to our constituencies and our constituents are being forced to shut up shop and relocate elsewhere because the lack of Government support has left them with little choice. The lack of an industrial strategy has been a major factor in the lack of certainty over not just the last few years but, sadly, over the last 13 years.

There are positive examples of companies in the industry refusing to give up their UK-based factories and the workers who work in them. Next door to SKF in my constituency sits Comline, an auto parts business. When I visited Comline in Sundon Park, I was impressed by its innovation in dealing with the challenges thrown at it from all angles. It has a flourishing business that values its staff, and it has established strong trade links with offices abroad, which has perhaps guaranteed its continued success. Although I am glad that that has given the company security, it is deplorable that the Government have made international trade so complex that Comline has found it easier to trade with countries thousands of miles away than to trade with its offices in Northern Ireland.

Despite our proud history, I remain deeply concerned that our automotive industry has been consistently let down, with the industry's concerns ignored by this Government. The Government have been warned by representative bodies and businesses for months, even years, of the cliff edge facing the UK automotive industry due to the combination of changes to the rules of origin and a lack of battery-making capacity in the UK.

The collapse of Britishvolt in January 2023, having planned to build a £3.8 billion gigafactory in Blyth, Northumberland, is a stark reminder of these failures and is undoubtedly a disaster for the UK car industry. Even more worrying is the wider picture. Even if Britishvolt were going ahead, we would be far short of where we need to be to continue making cars in this country. The Faraday Institution says we need 10 gigafactories by 2040 to sustain our automotive sector. Without domestic batteries, we will have no domestic automotive industry at all.

While this Government dither on their investment strategy, a Labour Government would commit to rapidly scaling up UK battery-making capacity by part-financing eight additional gigafactories to create 80,000 jobs and power 2 million electric vehicles. New gigafactories will also allow the UK's automotive sector to source components locally and avoid tariffs from rules of origin agreements.

The Stellantis three—my hon. Friends the Members for Luton South and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and me—are sitting together. In May 2023, the car maker Stellantis, which owns Vauxhall, Peugeot, Citroën and Fiat, issued warnings that it may have to close UK factories if the Government do not renegotiate their Brexit deal. Under the current deal, UK car makers could face 10% tariffs on exports to the EU from next year due to rules of origin on where parts are sourced. Unfortunately, it is not us but business—companies such as Stellantis—that must be convinced that the Government will sort this out. Other car manufacturing giants and competitors, including Ford and Jaguar Land Rover, have joined Stellantis to warn

that the transition to electric vehicles will be affected unless the UK and the EU delay the strict rules of origin that are due to start next year and could add tariffs on car exports.

This is not a new argument that I have had. Before entering this House in 2019, I was a trade union officer with GMB. I declare now that I am also a proud member of it, which will not surprise anybody. Alongside the late Jack Dromey, who was a champion for the automotive industry—I hope everybody from across the House could agree on that—we took workers from Toyota, AstraZeneca, the whisky-making industry in Scotland and the Stoke potteries to meet the then Cabinet Secretary, now the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. I can see you looking at me, Madam Deputy Speaker, so let me say that I have informed him that I was going to mention him in the Chamber. When we went to speak to him with this delegation of manufacturing workers, every single one of us questioned what was going to happen when the rules of origin changes kicked in. He shrugged his shoulders, arrogantly saying, “This is going to be worked out.” Yet here we are, in 2023, many years later, and all those industries and workers are still left without a proper answer.

While the EU is pumping billions into manufacturing as part of its green industrial revolution plan, and the US is investing with the Inflation Reduction Act, our automotive industry is still being left behind. The UK lags behind the rest of the world in terms of global automotive manufacturing relative to GDP, ranking sixth in Europe and 17th in the world last year. The Minister talks about optimism, which is of course welcome, but that is the reality facing workers and the sector. I ask the Government to get real on this, because blind optimism does not pay the bills. It does not create certainty for an industry and it certainly does not make car manufacturers such as Stellantis think that this Government are serious about the automotive sector.

That means my constituency is missing out on potential businesses starting and growing in Luton North, and local people who are keen to work in those industries are being failed. This Government are not only preventing new British jobs from materialising, but diminishing existing jobs before our eyes. As I said, we are facing a possible 270-plus job losses at the SKF factory. That is coming at the same time as there are threats to close ticket offices, including at Legrave station. We cannot take more job losses in Luton North. My constituents are having the jobs they have done diligently for generations stripped from them, in the automotive sector, in rail and in all manner of business breakdowns.

It is clear that this Government's sticking-plaster approach cannot continue. Labour has stated time and again that securing an agreement with the European Union to make Brexit work for the automotive industry is critical to ensuring its survival. The knock-on effects of the Government's approach are being felt across the manufacturing industry more widely. Staggering energy costs, a lack of an industrial strategy and investment, and a more competitive European market mean that manufacturing across our country could soon cease to exist in its entirety. Clearly, our automotive industry needs a Government that will fight to support it to be competitive in the global market. Labour will deliver a modern industrial strategy to bring investment and jobs

to industrial heartlands. That will create an employment revival where there has been years of Conservative depression, because on these Benches we are about creating strong jobs with a secure future, not stripping them away.

Under Labour leadership, battery-making capacity in the UK would boom. We would support the creation of eight new gigafactories, with this all laid out and costed in our green prosperity plan. The new factories would allow for our home-grown automotive businesses to source their auto parts within the UK. That would be huge for businesses such as Comline in Sundon Park. Crucially, with these new gigafactories, we would introduce about 80,000 new British jobs. I know how much that would mean to my constituents, from youngsters getting apprenticeships to older people knowing they do not need to worry about redundancy before retirement. With eight new gigafactories, we would also power 2 million electric vehicles, which is so crucial for working towards our commitment to net zero. All of that would bring in an additional £30 billion to our economy. It sounds like a good deal to me.

We are committed to building strong economic foundations that businesses need to succeed, including through reforms to the apprenticeship levy and business rates to give firms flexibility where they need it, and making the UK a clean energy superpower by 2030 with net zero carbon electricity, lowering electricity costs for the car industry. That is the leadership and the strategy that the automotive industry has been crying out for, and that is what a Labour Government would provide.

2.45 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), a good friend who spoke so passionately about the length of time Luton has been associated with Vauxhall Motors—I appreciate the Minister nodding at that. As we have heard, the automotive industry is critical to the UK's economy; it is a jewel in the crown of British manufacturing. I agree with the comments made by our Front Benchers about the importance of maintaining a good manufacturing sector in our country and the associated good, skilled jobs.

In Luton, we are proud of our automotive heritage. For once, let me carry on a football analogy by saying that we are also proud of our premier league football team. Generations of families have worked at the Vauxhall plant, making many well-known family cars and, more recently, medium-sized vans, based on the Vauxhall Vivaro. I have seen the heritage displayed in all sorts of ways. When I visited Someries Junior School recently, it had the full history of Vauxhall set out in a montage, where the cars had been drawn on and the history from 1905 was talked about. Similarly, when I have been out talking to the people of Mid Bedfordshire, I knocked on the door of someone who works at Vauxhall and is the daughter of one of the Unite representatives.

I was pleased to meet the Minister recently to talk about the importance of the automotive sector to Luton and the need for a long-term strategy to safeguard the industry and good jobs in our town. Having joined this place in 2019, I first raised the issue of the need for a strategy specifically to support the automotive industry some three years ago, in July 2020. The Minister has seen me raise many an automotive issue. If the hon.

[Rachel Hopkins]

Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) was here, I could assure him of how many times I have raised the issues of semiconductors, electric vehicle batteries, gigafactories, the supply chain, rules of origin and charging infrastructure. There is a genuine interest here about the importance of all of it to our economy.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am hesitant to interrupt, because I know of my hon. Friend's expertise in this area. However, may I ask her: are the Government giving enough help for the future of our industry? Many believe that hydrogen power is coming fast, and that its impact might be similar to what the invention of the railways meant for the canals. Are the Government giving enough hope and resources to the industry to look forward to hydrogen power as well as battery power?

Rachel Hopkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Obviously, the Opposition are hosting this debate to get support for the automotive sector, and his question about whether the Government are giving sufficient support to hydrogen is perhaps one for them. I want to make sure that I have my points on the record about the future of electric vehicles at the Vauxhall plant.

Three years on, I am still calling for that long-term plan from the Government. Despite the Minister reciting many a meeting, visit and champion of X, Y and Z, where is the plan that we can all look up to and see how it is going to support our sector? We have seen this Conservative Government preside over a 37% fall in British motor manufacturing since they came into office in 2010. Indeed, eight out of 10 cars produced in the UK are exported, yet exports of cars manufactured in the UK fell by 14% in 2022. Government inaction, which we are debating today, threatens the future of the automotive industry and of Vauxhall in Luton, particularly the future of its electric vehicles.

The UK is heavily reliant on battery technology from Asia. While the UK currently falls under the threshold of rules of origin quotas, the ratcheting up from the beginning of next year poses a risk to the UK automotive industry. As we have heard, Stellantis, the owner of Vauxhall, told the Business and Trade Committee inquiry into the supply of batteries for EV manufacturing in the UK:

"There will not be sufficient battery production supplies in the UK or in Europe by 2025 and 2030"

to meet the rules of origin requirements.

Rather than working with the EU to suspend a ratcheting up in rules of origin requirements until 2027, I am concerned that we will see too little, too late from the Government, and the Conservatives will oversee the imposition of 10% tariffs from 1 January next year. Just for nuance, those tariffs are 10% to 22% for electric vans, which particularly impacts the Vauxhall plant in Luton South.

Overall, these tariffs would hinder the UK's struggling automotive sector, pass on yet more cost to British people, already struggling with a cost of living crisis made in Downing Street, and would make the green transition unnecessarily unaffordable for millions across the country.

Until we have sufficient domestic battery production, our industry will be at a major competitive disadvantage, in particular against Asian imports, specifically from South Korea, Japan and China. The reality is that if the cost of EV manufacturing in the UK becomes uncompetitive and unsustainable, the future of domestic operations will be at risk. Decisions will be made by producers to move production elsewhere, if there is no confidence in the UK Government's desire to facilitate a sustainable automotive and electric vehicle market, a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), particularly as British businesses are also facing the highest energy costs in Europe.

It is also important that the Government recognise the innovation and technological advancements posed by the wider industry. Since joining the all-party motor group, I have learned a lot about how motorsport in the UK—the best in the world, with the greatest engineering and tech teams—influences the ordinary automotive sector. For many years, we have seen a cycle where cutting-edge motorsport develops innovative automotive solutions and efficiencies that the automotive sector later adopts for the wider market.

We have heard about steps being taken on sustainable fuels, but much more has been linked to the huge strides in technology relating to software. It is right to remember how the motorsport industry pivoted brilliantly during the pandemic to support the ventilator challenge. I raise this because if the Government sit back and allow the demise of our automotive industry, we will risk losing the world-class engineers, tech experts and motorsport companies, as they will look elsewhere for an environment that is more conducive to the sport. That would be detrimental, not only to the entertainment side of motorsport, but as a significant contributor to our economy and society.

As we have heard, Labour has an excellent plan to turbocharge electric vehicle manufacturing. In government, we will prioritise an agreement with the European Union to ensure that manufacturers have time to prepare to meet rules of origin requirements. We are committed to rapidly scaling up UK battery making capacity, by part-financing eight additional gigafactories, creating 80,000 jobs, powering 2 million electric vehicles and adding £30 billion to the UK economy.

Labour will accelerate the roll-out of charging points and give confidence to motorists to make the switch, with binding targets for electric vehicle chargers. Our plan includes measures to make the UK a clean energy superpower by 2030, with net zero carbon electricity, lowering electricity costs for the UK car industry. I look forward to supporting Labour's business team to make this a reality, so that the young people in Luton South see a positive future ahead of them, with good, skilled jobs for the long term.

2.54 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): It should come as no surprise to anyone that since the Conservative Government took power in 2010, the country's automotive industry has been failed by a lack of investment or any long-term strategy. Since 2010, as set out by other speakers in the debate, we have experienced a 37% decline in British motor manufacturing. That is not insignificant and it is set to continue.

I am lucky enough to be a member of the Business and Trade Committee. A couple of months ago, I asked experts, on a panel discussing the UK's industrial strategy, how the UK is placed to take advantage of the electric car industry, and about the levels of investment on offer to support companies settling in the UK and creating jobs here, compared with those in the US and across Europe. Put simply, their response was startling but it was absolutely correct. The response from each industry expert was that right now there is no comparison between what is on offer with the Inflation Reduction Act in the US and what is on offer in Europe. That is unfortunate, but that is the reality of where we are at this moment in time.

Looking at the statistics regarding this extremely important debate, the Conservatives have presided over a 37% decline in British motor manufacturing since 2010. There are 780,000 people employed across the UK automotive sector, with 182,000 of those directly employed in manufacturing. Annual UK car production fell by 9.8% in 2022, from 859,000 units to 775,014 units. The UK lags behind the rest of the world in terms of global automotive manufacturing relative to GDP, ranking sixth in Europe and 17th in the world in 2022. Eight in every 10 cars produced in the UK are exported, yet exports of cars manufactured in the UK fell by 14% in 2022. The EU is by far the largest export market for UK-produced vehicles—57.6% of vehicles produced in the UK are exported to the EU.

It is now three years since a gigafactory in my constituency of Wansbeck was proposed, and we have been hoping for the development of Britishvolt at Cambois. In the run-up to Christmas, at a time when people are wondering if they are going to get additional socks, Old Spice, Blue Stratos or new boxer shorts, I got a great surprise, finally. In December 2020, I got a call from a businessman who informed me that he was to develop a big company called Britishvolt, only two miles from where I live. It was as if all my Christmases had come at once: 8,000 much-needed jobs in an area like Wansbeck and like south-east Northumberland, covering different skills. They were secure, unionised jobs that were set out in the telephone conversation I had in December 2020, just prior to Christmas. We were going to get a big gigafactory. It was heralded at the time by Ministers as a perfect example of levelling up. It was heralded by the then Prime Minister as a project that would boost the production of electric vehicles in the UK, while levelling up opportunity and bringing thousands of highly skilled jobs to communities in our industrial heartlands. However, Ministers were not so keen to be attached to it when Britishvolt went into liquidation after failing to get the funds that it needed to continue. That included the money that the disgraced former Prime Minister told me from that Dispatch Box was “in the post”. I asked him at PMQs when BritishVolt would be receiving the £100 million from the automotive transformation fund. He rose, clenching his fists anxiously, and said that the cheque was in the post. I support the CWU and I support the strikes at the Royal Mail, but I am afraid that that cheque never arrived. I do not blame the strikes for that, although others may wish to do so.

That money never ever arrived for Britishvolt. I listened to a Member earlier who said that, had that money been paid to a community such as mine, it would have been frittered away. Let me tell Members: people in my community deserve as much investment in jobs than

anywhere else in this country—whether it be a constituency led by the Conservatives or by the Labour party. My constituency deserves to be cared for the same as anybody else. If £100 million is being invested in one constituency, it is seen as fantastic; it should not be seen as being frittered away in a constituency such as mine. It is an insult to everyone in the south-east of Northumberland, and obviously to my patch.

The current situation, as the Minister knows, is that the Britishvolt project was bought by an Australian company, Recharge Industries, and it has given us a glimmer of hope. I asked the Minister a few weeks ago in Question Time whether we could meet up to discuss what support the Government could give to Recharge Industries. She agreed to meet, but we have not yet had the opportunity to do so, so I gently nudge her and say that I would welcome that discussion, because we need that gigafactory. Every industry expert says that we have the best site in Europe for a gigafactory. The only way that it will happen is if we get the support that we need from the Government. So far, it does not look as if that will happen. As I have said before, it would create 8,000 jobs: 6,000 jobs in the supply chain and 2,000 at the factory.

Matt Western: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and ask him to excuse me for having to leave the Chamber temporarily. The point he is making is important. I was in his area earlier this year and saw for myself the new National Grid facility. With its interconnectors and the 3% of UK electricity potential coming ashore from Norway, it is, I agree, the perfect site for a gigafactory—alongside Coventry, of course.

Ian Lavery: I will not get into the football analogies that have been drawn on today. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has visited my constituency and seen for himself the potential that Energy Central has in Northumberland. Whether it is the two interconnectors or the Catapult facility in Blyth for renewable energy, we have a lot going on in the Blyth estuary region and, of course, in Wansbeck.

We need to give people some hope. We need to give my constituents the same sort of hope that everybody else is getting. I have sat patiently listening to Members who have lots of jobs in their constituencies. They are very happy with those jobs and the fact that things could not be any brighter. The hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) said, “Come and have a look at Bosworth. It is fantastic.” I say to him, “Come and have a look at Wansbeck and see how that stands as compared with Bosworth.” I am delighted for the people of Bosworth, but he should be coming to my constituency to see the difference. It is just not fair.

Dr Evans: When it comes to the automotive industry, we should be talking about the whole of the UK. The hon. Gentleman speaks passionately about the site of the gigafactory. I know it well, because Britishvolt spoke to me about the site and what it has to deliver. I am more than happy to support him and his constituents, because this is about what the UK can offer to the rest of the world. The automotive industry here is a leader in doing that, so I will champion that, because it happens to be in my constituency. I would love to see it thrive in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, too, so that we have jobs and prosperity across the UK.

Ian Lavery: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but he should come and have a look. He can drive his electric vehicle up the road and call in to see the obvious difference between my constituency and his.

Sarah Owen: This is indeed a UK-wide issue in that if one of us succeeds in the sector, then we all succeed. However, we are talking about not just the jobs of the future that need to be created and maintained, but, unfortunately, the jobs now that need to be saved. There are just not the equivalent jobs for people to go to. Is this not a serious problem for the sector? It is not just about future jobs, but about saving the jobs now.

Ian Lavery: That is an excellent point. The reality is that we have lost 37% of production in 13 years. If there is not a halt to that and if there is not the investment that is required to maintain and then increase employment, we will see a total loss of the automotive industry in this country. It is as simple as that. Members have mentioned the different new rules coming into place, the state of origin rules and issues such as that. It is getting more and more difficult to maintain and increase what we have, on top of a 37% decline. The reality is that we do not have anything in place to make that transformation from where we are now to where we need to be. We need to have, I think, nine new gigafactories. We have one. In fact, it is half a gigafactory. That is just not good enough. We keep being told by the Conservatives that they are on the case, that the development is coming, and that they will be developing it—whether it be in Coventry, in the midlands or wherever; hopefully, the next one will be in my constituency—but it is not right to continue saying that we are on track. We are not on track. There needs to be some investment. We need the readies. We will not get people rolling up to different areas saying that they will build a gigafactory unless they have support from the Government.

We should look at the support that other countries have given to their businesses in grants and loans: CATL in Germany received a loan of €750 million, 22.8% of the total build cost; Northvolt in Sweden got €505 million, 17.1% of the build cost; GM in North America got \$2.5 billion; Stellantis \$1 billion; Tesla \$1.3 billion; and Ford \$884 million. Britishvolt, which had so much promise, were promised £100 million, 2.3% of the build cost. That was heavily caveated to the point where the company never had a penny of Government support.

We should take a look at the stats. What Labour is suggesting would provide a fantastic opportunity. It needs to be grasped. Regions up and down the country will benefit greatly as a result of what has already been described as turbocharging electric vehicle manufacturing. There could be £30 billion-worth of investment in the regions. We cannot turn that down, but we have to get on with it, which is why I hope that once the election comes and we get elected as the next Government this can be introduced without delay. It will make a huge difference to areas such as the north-east, which will have 13,000 jobs in vehicle manufacturing. Its share of the £30 billion in economic benefits from the Labour plans will be £2.45 billion. Areas such as the west midlands will have 57,000 such jobs, and it will receive £10.76 billion in its share of the investment. The list goes on. The north-west will have 22,000 jobs in vehicle manufacturing and £4.13 billion-worth of investment.

That Labour party turbocharging of electric vehicles is so important and so exciting, but my constituency has been absolutely battered. It has been bruised by the deindustrialisation programme of past Conservative Governments. The lack of an industrial strategy from the Government is still holding my area back significantly. Levelling up means an active state willing actively to protect and invest in the interests of people in held-back areas such as my constituency of Wansbeck. The area where the site would have been developed lies in Cambois, a coastal area in the parish of East Bedlington. Bedlington and Wansbeck—not in Blyth. Britishvolt was never in Blyth. A number of people have mentioned that today, and I have already mentioned it to the Minister a few times. Britishvolt was not in Blyth; that is a Conservative seat next door. Britishvolt is in Wansbeck—my patch. I thought that I would make that point once again, because it appears that very few people listen to what has been said.

We have a proud history in the industrial revolution. It is a coal area. My patch was coal town. We were built on coal. We were part of the great industrial revolution, not only extracting the coal that powered it, but being the birthplace of wrought iron rails in the Bedlington Ironworks, which triggered the railway age. Why should that industrial heritage not be continued at the site of what could be the heart of the green industrial revolution—the transport industrial revolution—simply because once again the Government have failed to deliver for the people of Wansbeck and south-east Northumberland? We need to do a lot better for my constituents.

3.12 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am grateful for the Speaker's agreement, and that of the Whips, to my speaking in today's debate.

If anybody does not know it yet, Ellesmere Port, which I am proud to represent, is synonymous with Vauxhall Motors. I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) will say that Luton is equally synonymous. I put on the record my gratitude for their support, and that of their predecessors, when we faced similar battles to keep our plants open. We have heard already that we all have to succeed if the UK car industry is to succeed. I will show my solidarity with them to keep this important sector going. They will recognise the pride that we all have in being such a major part of the UK car sector.

Generations of my constituents, though not as many generations as those of my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North and for Luton South, have worked in the Vauxhall Motors plant since it first opened in around 1960. When I drive away from my house in my constituency in my Vauxhall Astra, I go past many houses that have Vauxhall workers in them, or Vauxhall pensioners, or people who have had family and friends who work at Vauxhall. That is just before I get to the end of my street. It is a long street, but I think that it is symbolic of the fact that every part and corner of my town has a link to the factory. Indeed, as the town grew the plant grew, from the 1960s onwards. Although it does not employ anything like the 12,000 people that it did at its height, it is still a substantial employer in the town. That of course does not take into account the many people employed in the supply chain and associated

industries; neither does it account for the great potential that we have for greater numbers if the new van, which is coming soon, proves to be the success that we hope that it will be.

The parent company may now be called Stellantis, and my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North and for Luton South and I are now “the Stellantis three”, but Vauxhall Motors is the name that gives us pride in our community. It is something that we all recognise. The jobs that Vauxhall Motors, or Stellantis, provides are the sort that I want our future success to be built on: highly skilled, unionised, permanent jobs, manufacturing something that is a matter of national and local pride. When the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), spoke about his pride in the Nissan plant in Sunderland, those words really resonated with me. Those of us who have big local manufacturers take great pride in what they have done for our communities, and indeed the wider economy.

As you would expect, Madam Deputy Speaker, the plant has regular fights for survival, and I am proud that alongside many others I have played my part to ensure that it is still there, but it does not get any easier. Every five years or so, when the next model is discussed, plants across Europe are effectively pitted against each other to bid for the next job. The productivity of the local workforce and their co-operation with Unite the union, which for the record I am a proud member of, work extremely well. They show tremendous leadership to work with management. In the past, that has put us in the best possible position to secure future work. The partnership between the trade union and management is a real exemplar of how employee relations can be conducted for the benefit of everyone.

The local authority, and indeed central Government, have played their part too, both in recent years and in the previous decade, with initiatives such as the car scrappage scheme and the Automotive Council, which helps not just Vauxhall Motors but the entire sector more generally. Before the new van rolls off the production line for the first time, which I hope will be shortly, the challenge to secure the next model has already begun. That challenge has many similarities with the obstacles that the entire sector needs to overcome, as we have heard about.

I am confident that our workers and management locally will be able to show that they are competitive compared with other plants, but will that be enough if they face a 10% surcharge on their exported products, as it looks as if they may be facing from next year? I think that we all know that expecting any business to remain competitive if it has an additional 10% cost added to it is unrealistic. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South mentioned, for vans the tariff could go up to 22%. The clear warning signs are there that we need to do something dramatic to avoid that cliff edge.

There are six months to go before we get to that point, which shows that we are in the danger zone. As has been mentioned, the Government had years to address this issue. They either need to renegotiate the deal to get rid of the tariffs or get enough battery plants on the ground so that tariffs do not matter any more. Unfortunately, neither of those things has happened. When the EU is pumping billions into manufacturing as part of its green industrial plan, and the US is

investing trillions as part of the Inflation Reduction Act, the inaction in the UK becomes negligence. If we want the UK to be a clean energy superpower by 2030, and to avoid falling off a cliff edge before then, we need a much more interventionist Government who will help the automotive sector to make this important transition. Gigafactories, charging infrastructure and reshoring the supply chain will not happen by magic, especially when the US and EU are actively pursuing that for their own industries.

Look at the evidence given to the Business and Trade Committee about the challenges that we face. These are some of the quotes given to the Committee on the matter recently:

“At the moment, the UK does not have a strategy. It does not have a runner in this race...Capital is far more incentivised to go to the US.”

Right now there is no comparison with what is on offer with the Inflation Reduction Act, and what is on offer in Europe. That is unfortunate, but it is the reality of where we are. The problem is that when other nations are putting in massive amounts, not putting in that level of cash makes us uncompetitive. It is difficult for shareholders to make a positive decision if we are not putting the same amounts on the table. That is what the industry has been very clearly telling us.

We know, as we have heard already, that we need at least eight or possibly nine gigafactories to make the UK car industry viable, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) said, we may have half a gigafactory coming on stream, or maybe two at best, if we are lucky. He told us in some detail about the struggles to get that gigafactory up and running in his constituency, and that should tell us that this needs full attention. I know my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) has been actively campaigning to get a gigafactory site in his constituency capable of serving not only Vauxhall Motors but probably also JLR and some other factories in the region.

I am pleased to say that our request to meet the Minister was granted, just before this debate in fact—what a great coincidence that was—because we think there needs to be recognition that there is a lot of chicken and egg in this situation. If we do not have the gigafactories, we will not have the car plants; if we do not have the car plants, we will not have the gigafactories. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North said, we all have to succeed in this. It cannot be just one or two plants. For the future to work in this sector, we all have to succeed.

Let us get more of these gigafactories up and running, with spades on the ground in the next 12 months, before we get the point where the sector decides that there just will not be the capacity to move forward with a viable UK car industry. As we know from many other industries, once it is gone, it is gone. As the Faraday Institution has said, we need a “timely and co-ordinated effort” to attract more gigafactories to the UK. We need to develop a resilient, sustainable and efficient supply chain and build up skills capabilities. That takes leadership, and it is about time we saw some from the Government.

We definitely need a strategy, and one that is interventionist in its outlook. When people decry the £28 billion a year that my party is committed to spending on greening the economy, I have to say to them, just look at what a fraction of that could do for the car industry. I believe it could be money well spent.

[Justin Madders]

However, we can also do other things better. We need to make better use of the taxpayer pound that we already spend, and the most cursory look around the fleets in most other countries shows that we stand almost alone in failing to recognise the importance of social value as part of our procurement process. In France, the police drive Citroëns, Renaults and Peugeotts produced in French factories. In Germany, they drive Mercedes, BMWs and Volkswagens. In Spain they drive Seat vehicles; in Sweden, it is Saabs and Volvos and in Italy they drive Alfa Romeos, Fiats and even sometimes Lamborghinis.

All those countries are governed by the same directive as we used to be, yet they all seem to be able to procure vehicles in the way that supports their own industry. We are no longer part of the EU, so we have no excuse now, and I ask myself what is stopping us being able to make use of public sector procurement powers to support our automotive sector. I ask myself why police officers in Cheshire are using vehicles made thousands of miles away when they could be in vehicles made just down the road at Vauxhall Motors. It does not have to be that way. The automotive sector has had more than its fair share of challenges due to Brexit, as we have heard, but let us use some of those so-called new-found freedoms to bring us some benefits as well.

A proper strategy on charging points is needed, but, just as with the overall industrial strategy, there is a mistaken belief that things should just be left to the market. In consumers' minds there is now hesitancy about moving over to EVs and making a huge financial commitment at a time of cost of living crisis. The initial cost and inconvenience of running an electric vehicle is at the forefront of their considerations. Brand-new electric vehicles are far more expensive than second-hand traditional vehicles and, while electric vehicles are becoming a greater proportion of new sales, I am concerned that we will face a natural ceiling on them before too long.

As technologies progress and electric vehicles become more numerous on the roads, focus has turned to the availability and practicality of owning one. Concerns have arisen around access to and the cost of on-street charging. Given that around one third of UK homes do not have access to off-street parking, whether a driveway or a garage, we need a more effective way to public charging before we reach 2030. There is also a profound unfairness in the fact that those whose properties lack driveways pay four times as much in VAT as those who can use domestic supplies of electricity.

The Government's commitment to building 300,000 new charging points is to be welcomed, but between 2017 and 2022 only 1,603 were installed, and almost 75% of those were located in the west midlands, the south-east and London. The north-west received only 0.7% of the total installed. London now possesses 100% of the charging points required by 2025, yet every other region in the country is lacking. According to analysis by Transport & Environment, most of the UK's regions possess less than 50% of the estimated charging capacity required by 2025. In regions such as my own in the north-west, the north-east, the south-west and Northern Ireland, it is only around 30% of the capacity required. My local authority, Cheshire West and Chester, has only 28% of the chargers required by 2025—a stark

comparison with wealthy London boroughs such as Westminster, which already has 358% of the chargers it needs.

That is not a good record for a Government who stood on a platform of levelling up the country—there appears to be no strategy to deal with those regional disparities. I am not sure that the Government even recognise that they exist. There is a huge opportunity for so-called “left behind” towns to receive some central investment for major charging points, so that those who cannot access private sources of electricity can come in to their town centre, charge their car and rejuvenate their town centre at the same time. There is a real opportunity there, but it will not happen by chance; it needs Government action.

When the Government's report on charging infrastructure acknowledges that the process is arduous, we have to ask what they are going to do to change it. The report states:

“Installing and operating chargepoints requires several parties across the energy sector, local government and the transport sector to work together effectively.”

But where does the responsibility for that ultimately lie? That is the endgame for the whole automotive sector.

Someone has to step up to the plate and say, “Yes, this jewel in the crown of our manufacturing sector is going to be supported and supported properly, because we recognise that for our constituents, for our economy and for our environment, the car industry in the UK will only survive if there is the political will, backed up by a properly funded strategy, to make sure that it actually happens.” If the Conservative party will not do that, it should make way for one that will.

3.26 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). As someone who is passionate about this industry, I would say that there is huge support for talking up the sector on the Opposition side of the Chamber, as we have heard in the contributions of colleagues over the last couple of hours.

When I think of the sector's contribution to UK plc, I think about the alloy wheels being made in Fort William, the Ferodo brakes being made in Chapel-en-le-Frith and the panels being beaten out in various parts of the country. I think about the likes of the factory just around the corner from where I live that makes the gearbox for the Bugatti Veyron, no less. Up and down this country we have some of the finest companies and the finest engineers making products, contributing to the supply chain and to the original equipment manufacturers that produce vehicles of all sorts, from motorbikes to diggers.

I also pay tribute to a great old friend of mine who we all remember, Jack Dromey, who called this automotive industry the “jewel in the crown” of UK manufacturing. That is something I have always believed, and indeed I spent a great deal of my life working in it.

On the point about the few contributions made about the sector in this place, back in May 2018 I held a parliamentary debate on the subject, and I was disappointed by the number of contributions from certain quarters. Five years ago, I talked about the challenges that the industry faced, and the points I made then are hardly

different from some of the points that the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has highlighted in its five-point plan.

The real fear across the industry is that the Government are not acknowledging the importance of the sector, and certainly have not over recent years. Until a few years ago, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) had an industrial strategy, which was recognised by the industry, but that has, of course, fallen by the wayside. Indeed, I attended the SMMT international conference a year ago. A collection of industry heads from around the world, as well as UK bosses from right across the sector, were assembled for a full day's conference. The keynote speech was given by the Prime Minister, who was then Chancellor. Sadly, it lasted a minute and 40 seconds.

I will not put words into the mouths of others, but the reality is that, that day, the industry felt utterly disrespected by this place. The Government are the Government, but the industry thought, "Well, what does Parliament really think about the contribution we are making to the UK economy?" Such a short keynote speech was felt, by Japanese or European colleagues who came over here to listen to the UK Chancellor, to devalue the industry's work, as well as its investment. Unfortunately, those signals are very badly read in boardrooms across the world because, of course, the UK industry is made up of companies that are headquartered in Japan, Paris, Munich or wherever, and they listen carefully to the messages coming out of this place. That is important.

To give credit where it is due, Margaret Thatcher actually recognised the importance of the UK industry by bailing out British Leyland back in the day, which saved brands such as Jaguar Land Rover and Mini, as well by attracting inward investment from the likes of Honda, Toyota and Nissan. Sadly, we have lost investment from Honda, Ford and others in the past few years. That is why we are at a challenging point for the industry's future.

We are blessed to have some great companies here, including Jaguar Land Rover, Stellantis, as we have heard, and BMW Mini. Then, of course, we have luxury and performance manufacturers such as Rolls-Royce, Bentley, McLaren, Aston Martin—just down the road from me—and all the other myriad specialist companies, including Lotus, Caterham, Morgan and so on. The sector is even wider if we include the likes of Norton, Triumph—about which we have heard—JCB and Caterpillar, as well the bus and coach manufacturers that have a presence here and in Northern Ireland, such as Wrightbus, which are doing some superb product development and addressing the need to get to net zero.

The sector is so valuable. It can contribute £67 billion in turnover and £14 billion in added value to the UK economy, and it typically invests £3 billion a year in research and development. However, the industry has been so reliant on fossil fuels that the transition to net zero is a critical point in its history. I will outline some of the issues, one of which is the political stability—or the lack of it—to revive and attract the business investment that we need. Of course, I welcome this morning's announcement by Renault-Geely, but we are really behind the curve. I will also pick up on a few challenges such as the ZEV mandate and the new trading relationship with Europe, including, of course, the rules of origin issue,

which is so critical. I will then touch on energy and the other import costs that are a real drag on investment in the UK, as well as the need for an EV and hydrogen infrastructure mandate if we are to get the sector going.

The transition needs a clear industrial strategy; it needs to become a political priority. Sadly, the words "industrial strategy" have not really been part of the Government's vernacular over the past few years, as we have heard. Make UK said that, under this Government, we have had a decade of "flip-flopping" on industrial strategy. Do they back business or not? Boris Johnson clearly did not, going by his immortal words. Of course, we had the kamikaze Budget of last autumn. That is all damaging to the way in which the global industry perceives the UK. This is not talking down the UK; it is the reality of the messages coming out of this place. Businesses want security and stability before they invest for, say, 30 or 40 years. Think about the Toyota plant at Burnaston, which has just celebrated its 30th year—that is a fantastic achievement. Nissan, of course, is that bit older, but those are really prized assets that we have.

Turning to net zero and the Government's ambitions with electric vehicles, we need to press on that issue and ramp up battery manufacture. As we have heard, we are way behind compared with other countries, but we also need to support wider adoption of vehicles. The plans we have—offering interest-free loans and potentially trialling a national scrappage scheme—are important. However, as I said, the charging point network for EV is way behind schedule. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) made the point that more EV charging points are being installed in Westminster than in the north of the country. That is quite a sobering statistic, and where we do have those few chargers, they are all too often poorly maintained. There needs to be a mandate to ensure that that infrastructure is delivered, not just for EV but for hydrogen hubs. We have made something like a tenth of the investment in hydrogen hubs that Germany has, which of course will be aimed at future heavy goods vehicles and other mass transport systems. Until recently, we had 12 hubs; that number has now fallen to six, I think, so we are going backwards when it comes to hydrogen hubs.

We have talked about battery production, and heard the passionate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). As someone who went to his constituency 40 years ago, I know how important that gigafactory would be for his constituents, and I would love to see that happen. The technologies are moving on rapidly: we can look at the work being done by Warwick Manufacturing Group, which is leading the development of battery technology, or by UKBIC, which is the industrialisation centre just outside Coventry. The UK absolutely could be at the forefront of that work, but we need the investments to make it happen, and as demonstrated by Britishvolt, that has just not been happening. There are some questions about what is happening with Recharge Industries as well.

I touched on hydrogen; Members have also made points about sustainable fuels, and there is something to be said about what could be done in that sector. The motorsport industry is doing a huge amount of work exploring those technologies, and again, we are very much at the forefront of what can be done in that space—how existing internal combustion engines could

[*Matt Western*]

be used with that kind of fuel to bring them close to net zero. That innovation is so important, whether it be through motorsport or our higher education institutions. We heard about HORIBA MIRA from the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) and we have motorsport valley down the M40, but the Advanced Propulsion Centre at Warwick is also doing some fascinating work, supporting new companies with emerging technologies to make them commercially viable.

As the Government will know, there are some real concerns about the ZEV mandate, certainly about the tradeable element and what it will mean if manufacturers miss their targets, as well as what those targets will be after 2030. Then, of course, we have the rules of origin, which—as we have heard from colleagues, particularly “the Stellantis three”—are a real and critical hit to the sector. I am not sure whether I am a Stellantis fourth in disguise.

Rachel Hopkins: In spirit.

Matt Western: Maybe in spirit, yes—that is exactly what it is. Those tariffs will be real tariffs, going both ways, but they will particularly impact on battery electric vehicles. That is why Labour would prioritise an agreement with the EU, because we have to deliver a modern border and customs framework that will facilitate smooth and cost-effective trade.

I will make a couple of other points. We need the skills to make this all happen, both in the network of our dealers and in our factories and our manufacturing sector, but we also need clean energy. We have such a cost disadvantage in this country compared with France and a lot of Europe, but particularly when compared with Spain, where energy costs something like a tenth of what it does here. That is why Labour will launch an urgent mission for a fossil fuel-free electricity system by 2030, because we have to reduce the cost to businesses and to EV drivers as well. When we see the work that President Biden is doing through the IRA, we realise just how much can be done with a vision, and that is what I think is frustrating so many want-to-be investors in this country.

In closing, I come back to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), which I thought was a clinical dissection of the challenges facing the sector. This is a really important sector—from e-mobility to motorbikes and diggers—for the value it provides not just in the abstract to UK plc, but as I cited in my opening remarks, to communities and constituencies up and down the country. When I speak to businesses in the sector, which is virtually every week and certainly every fortnight, they impress upon me the desperate need for some clarity because they want to make long-term decisions. These are companies such as JLR, Stellantis, Toyota, Nissan, BMW, Mini and others, and decisions have been made by boards elsewhere around the world. That is why, with colleagues, I will always talk up this industry. It is an industry that I think is so important to our future, and an industry at the point of transition. However, we will be honest about the challenges. We must champion the prospects and what this country can provide to them, because we want the investment, and the industry wants us to provide regulatory, political and economic stability.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): To wind up, I call the shadow Transport Secretary.

3.41 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): This has been an excellent debate, informed by real experts from across the House who are clear champions of their constituencies and of the automotive industry. I think the House can agree, following today's debate, that our automotive industry is truly the crown of British industry.

However, I would say very gently to the Minister that her speech really did sound out of touch with the reality that the industry and the workforce across our country are currently facing. We were treated to 35 minutes, but there was absolutely no plan, no explanation as to why we still do not have in place the strategy to ramp up our battery production, and no plan for how we are going to deal with the looming rules of origin deadline or the ZEV mandate.

As we have heard powerfully today, the industry is struggling under a Government who have no plan or strategy, and are constantly risking more jobs being shipped overseas. My hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Sarah Owen), for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), for Wansbeck and for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) all spelled out clearly the impact of this on their communities. This debate has been enormously enhanced by their contributions, and they are huge champions of the automotive industry in this place.

In the face of the new geopolitical reality and the approach our global allies are taking, the Government's current approach is little short of reckless. The Biden Administration are at the forefront of this new economic approach, taking an active role in rebuilding America's manufacturing base through their groundbreaking Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act. The European Union, with its Net Zero Industry Act, aims for 40% of its green industry to be based at home, and the Powering Australia plan is set to create 600,000 jobs and spur 76 billion Australian dollars of investment. Yet here in the UK, this Government seem content to settle for less and are resigned to good jobs and green growth continuing to head overseas.

So much for levelling up: it is exactly the communities that have already suffered from deindustrialisation that will be hit all over again. We know the story, and we have heard it again today, of how good, high-skilled, well-paid jobs disappear and their alternatives are low-paid and insecure, and of how poverty rises, inequality increases and the social fabric of communities is permanently torn. We simply cannot allow it to happen again, because the warning signs are already flashing.

Just two weeks ago, the Business and Trade Secretary and I both spoke at the British car manufacturers conference. The industry was clear that it urgently needs a strategy—or anything—from this Government. Mike Hawes, who has been quoted many times today, warned:

“We just need a plan, and one more cunning than Baldrick's. I don't care whether it's called industrial competitiveness, activism, or dare we say it, an industrial strategy. We just know we need it, and we need it urgently.”

What did the Secretary of State have to say in response? I quote directly:

“We will come out with plans soon, please stick with us”.

Is that really the best the Government can offer—begging industry to wait a little longer and to hold its nerve, as they admit that they have no plan after 13 years in government?

The reality is that we cannot afford to wait any longer. For decades, our car industry has been at the forefront of innovation and expertise. We have heard fantastic examples of that from my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington, for Ellesmere Port and Neston, for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), for Llanelli, and for Luton North, as well as from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South, who is a fantastic champion of motorsports. Under the Conservatives, however, we are losing the race for the jobs of the future. Car production has already slumped by one-third since 2010. By 2025, Germany will manufacture 10 times more batteries than we do, and the US 30 times.

We heard the whole sorry tale of the history of Britishvolt from my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck. He is right—it is an ideal site for a gigafactory, because it has the grid connections and supply chain in the north-east, but it has been failed, repeatedly, by this Government. Manufacturers are already leaving the UK or shutting up shop: Arrival has left Bicester for the US; Honda has closed its Swindon plant after 35 years of production; Ford has cut thousands of jobs at its Halewood plant; and manufacturers in the supply chain such as SKF in Luton are at risk of being offshored to Poland. Yet more problems are looming, self-inflicted by this reckless Government.

We have heard many times today of the impending cliff edge through the trade and co-operation agreement, with new rules of origin requirements that will apply huge tariffs to UK exports if we cannot produce enough batteries at home. The Government have had two and a half years since the agreement was signed, but they have failed to use that time to ramp up our battery capacity. That is coupled with their own looming ZEV mandate that industry has no detail about. Our industry will be slapped with tariffs, and demand will move to countries with the battery capacity such as China.

Communities such as Llanelli, Luton, Birmingham, Elsmere Port and Wansbeck will suffer, as will those such as Blyth, West Brom, South Derbyshire, Durham, and Crewe. That is why many constituents across the country will wonder why this debate has been so one-sided and from one side of the House, and why Labour will create the conditions for our car industry not just to survive, but to thrive. Our vision is one where good jobs in the industries of the future—jobs that people can be proud of and raise a family on—are brought back to our industrial heartlands. That is why, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, we have developed a plan to turbocharge electric vehicle manufacturing.

First, we will address the consequence of the Conservatives' Brexit deal, acting to avoid the cliff edge in the TCA that will slap tariff on our electric vehicles. We will rapidly scale up our domestic battery industry by part-financing eight additional gigafactories through our green prosperity plan. We will accelerate the EV charge point roll-out by setting new, binding targets on Governments, and we will make the UK a clean energy superpower by 2030, lowering the sky-high electricity

costs for UK industries and cutting £93 billion in energy bills for the British people, by investing in cleaner, cheaper, homegrown power for our country.

With Labour's plan to turbocharge our EV transition the opportunities are clear for all to see, and we have heard them expressed loud and clear today: resilience to withstand geopolitical shocks; 80,000 good, green jobs right here, not in China; £30 billion of investment across the country, forging resilience at home while creating new partnerships abroad; an active state working in concert with innovative, world-leading manufacturers, pursuing a modern industrial strategy; and new life breathed into our hollowed out industrial base. Mr Deputy Speaker, Labour will not shy away from the challenges facing our car industry. We will back it every step of the way, and we have the plan to prove it. I urge colleagues to support our motion today.

3.49 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): It has been an interesting and absorbing debate, and I thank all those who have taken part in it. I must say that I take my hat off to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds). It is interesting to know that he grew up in Sunderland, and I notice his great affection for the Black Cats—an affection I greatly share—Niall Quinn and the glory days of Peter Reid. Who but the hon. Gentleman could better hark back to the 1990s, and how much does he do so in politics as he does in football? It is a little unnerving to see him newly hirsute—at least in terms of the past year or three. He is getting an unnervingly close resemblance to His late Majesty King George V, which creates a somewhat unnerving impression across the Dispatch Box when one is trying to respond to the important points he makes.

The hon. Gentleman came, as did the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), with a clear agenda for this debate, which was to tell a desperate story of a struggling industry and a country labouring in its automotive manufacturing. Unfortunately, they have both had desperately bad luck in their choice of debate, because those gloomy speeches are made, and the desire for optimism is expressed, and then it turns out that Geely and Renault have today announced a pioneering new investment to become a global leader in new engine technologies. Not only that: it turns out that we just laid the new charge point regulations, which will make it easier than ever to own an EV. Those were widely welcomed, I might add, by Mike Hawes of the SMMT, who was richly quoted today by Opposition Members, and with reason. Fascinatingly, only today, Tesla has announced its intention to become an electricity supplier, which will itself become an enormously important part of that wider systems infrastructure that has been rightly mentioned. What a day to choose to be gloomy on. What a day of good news, and how much that reinforces the picture of an industry that is dealing brilliantly with the challenges and changes to its own circumstances.

Sarah Owen: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I would give way, but I want to respond to the many other points from Members who actually made speeches.

Sarah Owen: I made a speech.

Jesse Norman: I hope the hon. Lady will let me get to those points first. *[Interruption.]* We can go on, or Opposition Members can listen to what the Government are trying to say.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde talked about low business investment, and he is absolutely right that one should not pick and choose statistics but try to give a full picture. I was, therefore, slightly surprised that he ignored the fact that business investment has grown steadily since 2010. The Institute for Government published a report that tracks the crashing of business investment in this country to the Labour Administration and dates its recovery from 2008 to 2010. That is the picture of business investment that the hon. Gentleman asks us to get to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) rightly highlighted MIRA. What a great facility that is and what a great testing opportunity it will create for this country over the next few years. He is right to talk about grid connectivity and to mention Triumph Motorcycles, a business that I met only the other day, but he would have wanted to mention the strategic framework, which was announced last year, for electricity provision. If there is a report coming soon—he can speak from his knowledge of that in a Parliamentary Private Secretary context—I can only applaud that.

The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) worried about the roll-out of charge points. I hope she will be reassured by the new regs on charge points, which we have only just laid and which were welcomed by the SMMT and many other players across that industry. I also hope she will be pleased that ChargeUK, representing the charge point operators, has announced that £6 billion will be invested in charge points across the country over the next few years. That is a direct result of the ZEV mandate, which ties the creation of charge point infrastructure to the support for EVs in the systemic way that parties across the House, including the Opposition, recognise. It is those two things that will grow together. It is the ability to aim against that target of specific EV numbers coming into and being sold in this country that creates the priming for private investment, and rightly so.

I was pleased to hear the contribution of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), who was absolutely right to raise the topic of apprenticeships. As an apprentice in this House, I salute him; he echoed the “Education, education, education” policy of a former Member of this House with “Skills, skills, skills”, which I completely agree are very important. Let me remind him that in my constituency we are pioneering a specialist STEM technology university—the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering—which is just the thing that can be used to build skills and to prime levelling up across the country.

What a wonderfully fresh and enthusiastic speech from the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson). I was excited to hear it, but tragically it turned out to be a tag-team “curse on both your houses” misery exercise, relitigating Brexit long after that horse has left the stable. That was rightly picked up by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, who did not want to be drawn on Brexit. I understand why: the country took a decision and we are working with the consequences.

The hon. Member for Gordon said that the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Economic Security—a brilliant speech it was, too—was the length of time it would take to charge an EV. At 35 minutes, that is not quite true, but that is absolutely the ambition that we want to get to for all EV operators across the country. We want people to be able to charge very rapidly while they go and pick up a cup of coffee in the usual way.

I thank the hon. Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith) for her comment. She asked for a renewable energy focus and was right to do so. I hope that I can reassure her by reminding her that National Grid reported that in 2010 less than 20% of our energy was renewable, while in 2022—last year—more than 50% was renewable in five months of the year. That is tremendous progress. She may also be pleased to know that coal, which was used for 43% of electricity generation in 2012, is now at 1.5%. That is tremendous progress on both those fronts.

Sarah Owen: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Listening to the Minister’s response, I want to give him the opportunity to correct the record. Not only does he seem not to be living on the same planet as us, but he is clearly not in the same Chamber. He implied that I had not spoken in the debate, but I gave a lengthy speech on the issues we are facing in Luton right now. I invite him to correct the record at the Dispatch Box.

Jesse Norman: I would be happy to respond to the hon. Lady. That is not actually what I said. I said that I wanted to respond to the speeches and therefore I would not take interventions at that time. I will of course—*[Interruption.]* If she would prefer me to respond not to her speech but to an intervention, I will let her make an intervention.

Sarah Owen: I thank the Minister for finally allowing an intervention. He talked about optimism. Does he feel optimistic that the manufacturing industry now faces a 10% tariff on passenger cars and a 22% tariff on vans? Does he believe that we should all be optimistic about that future, or does he believe the reality—that the manufacturing industry faces a cliff edge?

Jesse Norman: If that is the best the hon. Lady can do, she would have been better to wait for my response to her speech. No, the truth of the matter is that this country is engaged in discussions and negotiations with European partners about the circumstances—we export an enormous number of cars, which is an important fact from their point of view as it is from ours—and it would be futile to discuss those matters in public. We all know that none of these negotiations is ever done in public, and that includes commercial negotiations, which Labour appears to wish to be done in public as well.

Let me proceed a little more. The hon. Members for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins), for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) touched on new gigafactories. I invite Opposition Front- Bench Members to comment further if they wish, because this is a much-heralded part of the Labour strategy, and if the Labour party seeks to subsidise eight new gigafactories, perhaps they would like to put on record how much public money—taxpayer’s money—they propose to spend on that and how it would be funded. We very much look

forward to seeing their plans. I will be interested to see whether they bear any resemblance to market conditions or show any signs of doing anything other than immiserating and impoverishing the British taxpayer.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises that the automotive industry is the jewel in the crown of British manufacturing and believes it can have a bright future creating good jobs for people across the UK; regrets that after 13 years of Conservative neglect the UK risks losing this world-class industry, putting thousands of jobs under threat; condemns the Government for its lack of an industrial strategy and the negative impact this has had on investment in the UK's automotive sector; calls on the Government to urgently resolve the rules of origin changes which are due to take effect in 2024, working with partners across Europe to negotiate a deal that works for manufacturers; and further calls on the Government to adopt an active industrial strategy to build the battery factory capacity needed to secure the automotive sector for decades to come.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I have now to announce the result of today's deferred Division on the Adjournment, summer, conference and Christmas recess motion. The Ayes were 395 and the Noes were 5, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]

Under-age Vaping

4 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned that children are being inappropriately exposed to e-cigarette promotions and that under-age vaping has increased by 50% in just the last three years; condemns the Government for its failure to act to protect children by voting against the addition of measures to prohibit branding which is appealing to children on e-cigarette packaging during the passage of the Health and Care Act 2022 and for failing to bring forward the tobacco control plan that it promised by the end of 2021; and therefore calls on the Government to ban vapes from being branded and advertised to appeal to children and to work with local councils and the NHS to help ensure that e-cigarettes are being used as an aid to stop smoking, rather than as a new form of smoking.

It is a pleasure to open this debate on behalf of His Majesty's Opposition. We are witnessing an incredibly alarming rise in under-age vaping. In many ways, the statistics speak for themselves. A recent study conducted by Action on Smoking and Health found that in the last three years alone, the number of children taking part in so-called experimental vaping has increased by 50%. That has come alongside significant growth in awareness of e-cigarette promotions, with 85% of children now conscious of e-cigarette marketing either in shops or online.

What does that promotion look like? If hon. Members walk down any high street in the country and pop into a vaping shop or off-licence, they will see it at first hand. Brightly coloured e-liquids with names such as "blue razz", "cherry cola" or "vampire vape" line the shelves. Some liquids are even designed to imitate well-known brands. We can find "Len & Jenny's mint Oreo cookie" alongside "pick it mix it sherbet lemons". In fact, it really is not an exaggeration to say that some stores selling vapes resemble old fashioned sweet shops, with pretty much any flavour we can think of covered in cartoon-led packaging. Let us make no mistake, this is not packaging marketed towards adults. It is deliberately designed to appeal to children and, most concerningly, it appears to be working.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Like my hon. Friend, I have been horrified to see custard, banana, bubble gum and doughnut-flavoured vapes, clearly targeted at younger palates. They are clearly not about helping people cease smoking. One of the challenges is that we know children are increasingly moving from vaping to actual cigarettes. Does he agree that there is no case for any further delay in the Government's work to look at how we take vapes out of the hands of young people all together? Our generation all fought so hard against Nick O'Teen; now, we have Mr Vape to deal with. Does he agree that it must be an urgent public health priority?

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a place for banana, custard and even doughnuts, but that is not on a vape package. She is right that we need to close the loophole and protect children's health. That is why we have tabled this motion.

In a recent evidence session on youth vaping, Laranya Caslin, the headteacher at St George's Academy in Sleaford, told the Health and Social Care Committee:

"we have a significant proportion of students vaping. They vape regularly".

[Andrew Gwynne]

The problem is so bad that St George's has had to change smoke sensors to heat sensors, to clamp down on young people leaving the classroom to vape.

I would love that to be an isolated case, but we all know, across the House, that it is not. In Hartlepool, concerns have been raised about an increase in primary school children using vapes—that is just shocking. In Devon, schools have reported confiscating e-cigarettes from children as young as seven. Those claims seem to be reinforced by the fact that last year 15 children aged nine or under were hospitalised due to vaping, with health experts warning that the excessive use of e-cigarettes in children could be linked to lung collapse, lung bleeding and air leak. In Yorkshire and the Humber, it is estimated that 30% of secondary school students have tried vaping, which equates to around 109,000 children. It is just staggering.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I am grateful to the shadow Minister for giving way. I have heard really shocking reports from parents and teachers in my constituency that children as young as 11 are using vapes and that one young person, at the age of 17, is now addicted. In the worst cases I am hearing, some young children are being targeted and are taking the vape apart to carry much harder drugs on the inside, which is causing an even bigger problem. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that we simply cannot wait any longer? We need urgent action from the Government to stop that happening.

Andrew Gwynne: The hon. Lady makes a powerful case. Those are precisely the reasons why we have called this debate. It should shock each and every one of us. The ease of access to e-cigarettes for children, many younger than the ages she gave as an example, just cannot be allowed. We must be doing all we can on e-cigarettes, as we did to tackle the packaging and advertising of actual cigarettes, to ensure that children are weaned off their nicotine addiction and that other children do not start vaping in the first place.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very effective speech to open this debate. He quoted the figure of 30% for Yorkshire and the Humber. The figure for the north-west is 29%, which shows very little difference. Those figures are twice that for London, so it may be that some hon. Members are not aware of how bad the problem is getting. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has warned that youth vaping is fast becoming an epidemic. Worryingly, the number of children admitted to hospital as a result of vaping has almost quadrupled. Is my hon. Friend, as a fellow Greater Manchester MP, concerned about how many more children might suffer those health impacts before the Government take the action that is needed?

Andrew Gwynne: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. As a Greater Manchester MP, I see the problem in my constituency and she will see it in hers. It concerns me greatly, because within our city region there are already communities that have some of the worst health inequalities. A lot of those health inequalities have been exacerbated by a higher than average prevalence of smoking. Even

now, as smoking rates have declined, there are still communities in the areas we represent that have an abnormally high number of smokers. I do not want, in tackling smoking and reducing some of the health inequalities that are caused through smoking, to be storing up future problems with a new generation caused as a direct consequence of vaping or, more sinisterly, as a gateway to smoking later on in life. She is absolutely right.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I am grateful to the shadow Minister for giving way; he is making a very good speech. No one in this country has ever been shown to have died from vaping, whereas thousands of people die each year from smoking. Yes, the emphasis should be on stopping children from gaining access to vaping and dissuading adult non-smokers from taking up vaping, but does he agree that we should not lose sight of the benefits of vaping for adult smokers in giving up smoking and therefore leading a healthier lifestyle?

Andrew Gwynne: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and later in my speech I will discuss the fact that vaping is a really important tool to assist people who want to stop smoking—indeed, Javed Khan, in his smoke-free 2030 review, made it clear that vaping has an important role to play in that respect. We certainly do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but we absolutely should be ensuring that children's access to vapes is restricted and that the marketing of vapes is not done in way that attracts a new cohort of people who would never have smoked or vaped. While vaping is better for people than smoking, not vaping is better than vaping or smoking, and we do not want to create new problems.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I am sure my hon. Friend has seen the study by King's College London and Action on Smoking and Health on the attraction of vaping, which concluded that among teenagers de-branding vapes had a deterrent effect on their purchasing them, whereas it had no effect on adults. Does he agree with that study and does he support action being taken along those lines?

Andrew Gwynne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for succinctly stating the reason for this debate. That study is very clear: for adults, the appearance of the packaging makes no difference, but children and young people are attracted to the bright colours and cartoon characters and so on. The same arguments were made about smoking and led to us moving several years ago to standardised cigarette packaging. The evidence on children vaping is now so overwhelming that Parliament must take the lead. Industry will not act without a nudge from us. We must make sure that vapes are not packaged and advertised in a way that attracts children.

In a recent article penned for *The Independent*, a teacher in Oxfordshire described having been:

“rostered on to control numbers of students in the toilet block in an attempt to prevent the constant vaping that goes on in there.”

She went on to describe discovering

“a stash of over 50 vapes stored above a ceiling panel in the toilets—a tactic learnt and shared on TikTok.”

Worryingly, ASH estimates that most children who vape make the purchases themselves, despite it being illegal to sell vapes to those under the age of 18.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Only yesterday, I had a call from a head of year in Gowerton School in my constituency who wanted to know why the police and social services were not acting on his reports of sales of vapes in a barber's shop in Swansea city centre. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is up to the police, social services and trading standards to take a stand and stop the face-to-face sale of vapes to under-age children?

Andrew Gwynne: Absolutely. There has to be a strategy that is not just about restricting packaging and advertising. There has to be more enforcement at the local level. I have some sympathy with local government, which has had to endure massive cuts over the past 13 years, so that things such as trading standards have been cut right back to the bone, but there can be no excuse whatsoever for shops selling these products to children. Every action should be taken to prevent that and to enforce the law.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting and important speech, but he is focusing on advertising, marketing, the bright colours and the sweet flavours, and he has not mentioned price. Price promotions are banned for tobacco, yet vapes can sometimes be bought for three for £12, which is pocket money territory.

Andrew Gwynne: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right. We tabled the motion because we believe that the action it calls for is something we can do quickly, but the price of vapes is also a driver, and she is right that we should look into deals whereby vapes can be bought really cheaply—as she says, with pocket money—because that would be another step to take vaping out of the reach of children and young people.

As I said, ASH estimates that most children who vape make the purchases themselves. Put simply, children are then increasingly being hooked on to addictive substances that are deliberately packaged—and, indeed, sometimes priced—to catch their eye. This affects not only their health but their education.

Who could have seen it coming? Well, not the Government, it turns out. In November 2021, my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) tabled an amendment to the Health and Care Bill that would have given the Secretary of State the power to prohibit branding that appeals to children on e-cigarette packaging. It received cross-party support but was voted down by the Government. When the Minister stands up in a few minutes and claims that the Government are on top of the epidemic of youth vaping, I hope he will explain to the House—to Members from all parties who supported that measure—why the Government voted down that sensible amendment in 2021, and why they are still failing to do something about this acute problem now.

Sadly, this approach to public health has become all too familiar when it comes to the Conservatives. We were promised a tobacco control plan; that was binned. We were promised a health disparities White Paper; that

was binned. We were promised a ban on junk food advertising to children; that was binned. Why? Because the Prime Minister is too weak to take on those on the fringes of his own party who view public health with suspicion. That is why, on the Conservatives' watch, health inequalities have widened, and why vaping companies have been given free rein to profit off children and young people.

The next Labour Government will not allow the trend to continue, which is why in Labour's health mission we have been clear that we will ban the packaging and marketing of vapes to children, and we will come down like a ton of bricks on those who sell vapes illegally to children.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I agree with the shadow Minister that this is an increasingly serious issue that we must arrest. Does he agree that this is not just a health mission but an education mission? The surest reason why young people will now either give up and desist or not take up vaping is if they understand the harms and the risks, so the new education provision that the Government are helping to bring forward in schools, whereby children themselves will speak to their peers to communicate the risks, is a really important and welcome intervention.

Andrew Gwynne: Of course education has a role. When I went to secondary school, we were educated about the harms of smoking, although it did not stop a number of my peers becoming addicted to cigarettes—to nicotine and tobacco. Education has a role, then, but it does not have a full role. We only really clamped down on smoking and cut the numbers of people who smoke when we introduced regulations on smoking, including the smoking ban, which I am incredibly proud that a Labour Government introduced because it has had massive public health benefits for many people in the years since.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) referred to the research conducted by King's College London in conjunction with ASH, which suggests that the removal of child-friendly imagery and colours on e-cigarettes can reduce their appeal to children while, crucially, not discouraging their use by adult smokers to quit. This is precisely the balance that the next Labour Government want to strike, so that vapes are used exclusively as a stop-smoking tool by adults, not as a way of getting young people hooked on highly addictive substances such as nicotine. I would hope that ambition was shared on both sides of the House but, unless the Minister changes his mind at the Dispatch Box, the Government are still refusing to commit to a promotion ban. That is bizarre because, in a recent interview, the Prime Minister was asked about the marketing of vapes to children, and he said:

“It looks like they are targeted at kids, which is ridiculous.”

The Prime Minister also said:

“The marketing and the illegal sales of vapes to children is completely unacceptable and I will do everything in my power to end this practice for good.”

Apparently, everything in his power does not include banning the practice of advertising vapes in this way.

Instead, the Government have announced yet another call for evidence, further kicking into the long grass the action that academics, teachers, parents and Members

[Andrew Gwynne]

on both sides of the House all agree is essential now. The Government can try all they like to feign outrage at the current situation, but it is partly because of their inaction that we find ourselves in this mess. The Department of Health and Social Care could easily have included these measures in its tobacco control plan, had it not decided to scrap that plan.

The measures are eminently sensible, and we do not need another call for evidence to tell us what we can all see in our own communities. When the Minister responds, I am sure he will point to the illicit vape enforcement squad that the Government announced back in April to enforce rules on vaping and to tackle illegal sales. The squad is obviously welcome, but a few things remain unclear. First, when will the squad start its fieldwork? In a recent answer to a written parliamentary question, the Minister admitted that it will not be until “later this year”. When specifically? We are now in July. What are parents and guardians who are concerned about their children’s vaping expected to do in the meantime?

What the Minister announced in April simply does not add up to a comprehensive tobacco control plan or a strategy for a smoke-free 2030, nor will it stop the companies that are specifically targeting vapes and e-liquids at our children. The Minister knows it and we know it, so let us drop the pretence.

The next Labour Government will end the 13 years of Tory public health neglect that have seen health inequalities widen and healthy life expectancy stall and go into reverse in some communities. In our health mission, we pledged to make this country a Marmot nation, to tackle the social inequalities that influence health and to ensure that children have the very best start possible, to give them the building blocks for a healthy life.

There has been no joined-up plan for public health for 13 years, and the British people have paid the price. That is why Labour will put a mission delivery board right at the heart of Government—one that works across the whole of Whitehall to deliver secure jobs, fair pay, adequate housing, safe streets and clean air. The next Labour Government will build on our legacy of smoking cessation and take the bold steps needed to reach a smoke-free future, a future that has drifted further and further away under this rudderless Government. We will tackle underage vaping and work alongside councils and the NHS to ensure that vapes are used exclusively as a stop-smoking aid.

In short, prevention is better than cure. We will reform our healthcare system so that it focuses relentlessly on preventing the causes of ill health in the first place. For voters, the next general election will be a crystal-clear choice: choose a Conservative Government who have undone decades of progress when it comes to public health, or choose a Labour Government who will work day in, day out to give everyone in Britain the opportunity to lead a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.

I commend our motion to the House.

4.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O’Brien): Protecting children from the risks of vaping is a key Government priority. We regulate vaping, with a minimum age of sale of 18; advertising restrictions, such as a ban on TV and radio;

and a cap on nicotine levels and tank sizes. However, in the past two years there has been an increase in children vaping, which is why we have already taken action and will take further actions.

Despite its effectiveness as a tool for adults to quit smoking, we are concerned about the risks that vapes pose to children and non-smokers. Vapes are not risk-free. Nicotine is highly addictive and can be harmful, and there are unanswered questions on the longer-term use of vaping. As Professor Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer says:

“If you smoke, vaping is much safer; if you don’t smoke, don’t vape”.

So earlier this year, in April, I announced new measures to step up our efforts to stop children getting hooked on vaping. First, I announced a new specialised illicit vapes enforcement squad. It is a dedicated new team to tackle underage vape sales and the illicit products that young people have access to, hold companies to account and enforce the rules. We are providing £3 million of new funding to trading standards, which will help to share knowledge and intelligence across the country; undertake test purchasing; disrupt illicit supply, including by organised crime gangs; remove illegal products from our shelves and at our borders; and undertake more testing to ensure compliance with our rules, bolstering the training capacity of trading standards. We have already made firms withdraw products where they do not comply with the rules. With the new squad, more companies that fail to comply with the law will be held accountable. I am pleased to announce that the National Trading Standards has begun its operation—that directly answers the question asked by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne)—and is gathering intelligence, training staff and bolstering capacity to begin its fieldwork.

In April, I also launched a call for evidence on youth vaping, to identify opportunities to reduce the number of children accessing and using vape products, and to explore where Government can go further. Our call for evidence explored a range of issues about how we ensure regulatory compliance. It was partly about the appearance and characteristics of vapes, including colours and flavours, and partly about their marketing and promotion, particularly the role of social media. Our call for evidence closed on 6 June and the Government are urgently and carefully examining the response.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I know that the Minister is committed to closing that loophole that allows vaping companies to give children free samples, but, as we have all discussed, this is about the direct gateway effect between people vaping and then smoking. Parents in Walthamstow they are convinced that more children will end up smoking as a result of being able to access vaping in any form at all. So why are the Government consulting on limiting access to vaping for under-18s, rather than just stopping it altogether?

Neil O’Brien: We are trying to stop access to vapes for the under-18s—it is literally illegal. We are trying not only to enforce the law but to reduce demand, as we have been discussing in this debate. We are not in disagreement about what the objective is: we do not want any kids to smoke or to vape—it is as simple as that.

Daisy Cooper: The Minister said that this is “literally illegal”. According to the director general of the UK Vaping Industry Association, 40% to 50% of the disposable vapes market is made up of illicit products. So does the Minister agree that as well improving the regulation of vapes within the legal market that we have heard about so far, we must also see improvements to border security, to clamp down on illicit vape sales?

Neil O’Brien: I completely agree with the hon. Lady on that point; this is exactly what our enforcement squad is doing, and I completely agree about the importance of doing it.

On the call for evidence, we will be producing our response in early autumn, identifying and outlining areas where the Government will go further. The key point is that we need evidence to take effective action to stop children vaping. While that call for evidence has been running, we have already taken further steps. At the end of May, the Prime Minister announced several new measures to support our efforts to tackle youth and kids’ vaping. That included closing the loophole in our laws that has been allowing companies to give out free samples of vapes to under-18s, which ASH estimates could total as many as 20,000 a year. He also announced that we will overhaul the rules on selling nicotine-free vapes to under-18s and on issuing fines to shops selling vapes to the under-18s.

The Prime Minister also announced that we will update the school curriculum, to emphasise the health risks of vaping within relationships, sex and health education lessons, just as schools currently do for smoking and drinking, so that kids understand the risks of vaping. We will be writing to police forces to ensure dedicated school liaison officers across the country are using the new resources available to keep illegal vapes out of schools.

I want to use this opportunity to outline the work we are doing to successfully reduce smoking, not least because the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson touched on it. In the 1970s, more than 40% of people smoked, and it was still 21% in 2010. Since then, we have taken a series of steps, including doubling excise duties and introducing a minimum excise tax on the cheapest cigarettes, that have helped to drive down smoking to a record low of just 13% in England.

We have gone from 21% to 13%, but of course we want to go further. In 2019, we announced our ambition for England to go smoke-free by 2030, which is considered to be 5% or less. Over the past decade, we have made significant progress towards making England smoke free. We have continued to invest in local stop-smoking services, to help smokers get the right support for them. We continue to work in support of the NHS. Last year alone, we provided £35 million to the NHS long-term plan commitments on smoking.

Youth smoking rates are now at their lowest rates on record. In 2021, just 3.3% of 15-year-olds were regular smokers, although of course we want to reduce that figure even further. Through the new measures I announced in April, the Government will be supporting many more smokers to quit through the tobacco reduction strategy. Some 1 million smokers will be encouraged to Swap to Stop, swapping cigarettes for vapes under a new national scheme that targets those who are most at risk and gives them free vapes. That is first scheme

of its kind in the world. It is based on experience from the successful local pilots, and is an evidence-based initiative.

Likewise, we will offer innovative, but evidence-based, financial incentives for all women to stop smoking in pregnancy. Again, this is based on evidence that has been gathered during local pilot schemes and the strategy will be implemented at a national level. Shortly, we will launch a consultation on cigarette pack inserts to provide further information to support smokers to quit, which is something Canada has done successfully.

Further, those who supply tobacco for sale in the UK must be registered for tobacco track and trace, and obtain an economic operator ID. We brought in that scheme to tackle illegal tobacco, but we now want to use the existing system in a new way, to help strengthen enforcement and to target the illicit market. From now on, when people are found selling illicit tobacco, we will not just seize their products but remove their economic operator ID, so they will no longer be able to buy or sell tobacco. We are exploring how to share information with local partners about who is registered on the track and trace system, so that they know who is and who is not legally entitled to sell tobacco in their areas, helping to drive enforcement.

We are committed to doing all we can to prevent children from starting to vape and we are already taking robust action in a range of areas. We are actively working on ways that we can go further, but it is essential that those methods are evidence based and that we have measures that will be effective.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister will have heard the figures given earlier: my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) said that 30% of secondary school pupils in Yorkshire and Humberside have tried vaping and I said that the figure for the north-west was 29%. I quoted the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health saying that youth vaping is “fast becoming epidemic”. He is talking about an evidence-based plan, but what is the situation around evidence? My local area still has very high levels of smoking, but we are now seeing the same pattern tracking in vaping among young people as we did in smoking. Does he agree that there needs to be different and further action in those places where the figures are so bad?

Neil O’Brien: The theme of my speech is that we have already taken action and we will continue to take action, but that it has to be evidence based. A range of suggestions has been made during the debate, and I am sure there will be more, about different things to do with flavours, packaging, colours and marketing. There needs to be evidence and definition about those things. Some people will probably say that we should ban all flavours; some will say, “Let’s ban all coloured vapes”; some will say that we should have plain packaging or vapes should be hidden from view. We will need to take an evidence-based view on all those issues, rather than just assuming that one knows the answer immediately.

It is not totally obvious to me what the position is of the Opposition Front Bench team on any of those issues—whether they would ban all colours, ban all flavours, demand plain packaging, or want the same kind of restrictions as there are for cigarettes in terms of where they are placed in shops. I am happy to take an intervention if the shadow team have answers to those questions. Is it a yes or a no to those things?

Andrew Gwynne: What we are here to talk about today is advertising and packaging. I made it very clear in my contribution that the next Labour Government would act robustly on both those issues.

Neil O'Brien: Act robustly? I think we all want to act robustly. The shadow Minister said in his speech that he did not like banana-flavoured vapes, but would they be banned? I am happy to take an intervention if the shadow team have an answer. I do not think that we have an answer. That, ladies and gentlemen, is why we need to have evidence. We need to have an evidence-based approach, and we need to have not just the evidence about what drives these things, but clear definitions of these things on which we can actually take action. We have to be clear about what we are and are not doing within all these fields.

All I was trying to do is to demonstrate that, while we are committed to taking action—I feel very strongly about taking action on this—and while we have done a whole range of different things on this point, we need evidence to make good policy, which is why we are having a call for evidence.

Daisy Cooper: The Minister will know that the Government commissioned the Khan review, which reported on 9 June 2022—a year ago. The Khan review took the evidence. It had the consultation and it made very firm recommendations about certain things that the Government should do. Why are we here again? Why are we consulting? Why can the Government not just follow the recommendations in the Khan review?

Neil O'Brien: On driving up support for people to Swap to Stop, we are following the recommendations. On the things that we have been discussing in this debate, a whole set of other questions have been raised, on which our call for evidence explicitly invited evidence, because we want to have an evidence-based policy.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, because I want to turn to the evidence. We know that, when we had plain packaging and removed advertising around cigarette sales, we saw a significant decrease in the use of those products, particularly among young people. We also have other evidence: Israel introduced plain packaging in 2020 and Finland in 2022. There is plenty of evidence out there on the implications of plain packaging, so why will the Minister not use that evidence and implement things?

Neil O'Brien: We are garnering evidence on every different aspect of this policy question. In my remarks today, I have tried to illustrate some of the questions that we are thinking about at the moment, which I am sure we will hear more of during the debate. I was simply trying to make the point that we need definitions of things and we need evidence before we take action.

In conclusion, we are committed to doing all we can to stop children from vaping—that is a personal priority of mine. We are also committed to stopping youth smoking. In order to meet our smoke-free 2030 ambition, we are committed to doing all we can to stop people from starting to smoke in the first place, and to give people the support that they need to quit and save their lives.

4.37 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is very welcome that we are here today. There is surely nobody in this place who thinks that we should not be working to protect children and young people from the health harms of vaping. The SNP absolutely supports the motion that we are discussing today. I am also very glad that the SNP Scottish Government are taking this issue seriously, too. They are looking at tighter restrictions on vaping advertising and promotion, they have a tobacco action plan being published later this year, and an urgent review is under way of the environmental impacts. Certainly, the management of single-use vapes is something that significantly concerns me. The potential policy responses could include a ban—on a personal note, I sincerely hope that that is what happens.

I have been in a number of these debates and, usually, comments are made about smoking cessation. Just to be clear: I am very supportive of all measures that allow people to be supported to stop smoking. Reusable vapes are a potential option. My concerns are very significantly around disposable vapes, but we should look at this issue as broadly as possible. Countries around the world are already doing that. In Argentina, Japan and Thailand, there is a complete ban on e-cigarettes. In the Netherlands, production stopped on 1 July and sales will end on 1 October. China, which is the main exporter of these vapes worldwide, has itself banned the sale of flavoured e-cigarettes. As things stand, there are 35 countries, which covers around 41% of the world population, where e-cigarettes have been banned.

One of the reasons why I became interested in this issue was that a constituent of mine, Laura Young, drew it to my attention. She said that whenever she was out walking with her dog she saw these disposables discarded everywhere. Of course, once she said that to me, I could no longer walk anywhere without finding disposable vapes myself. They are everywhere. It is an incredible amount of litter. They are on streets, on beaches, and in our schools, as we have heard. I found one in the loo in Portcullis House yesterday. They are described as disposables, but these things, which are being thrown away so casually, are not disposable; they contain plastic waste, and rare and potentially harmful elements including lithium.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): I am greatly relieved that my hon. Friend has touched on the environmental consequences. I realise that the motion is about children and vaping, and I think there is scarce evidence that there is anything other than harm available to children from vaping, in terms of their respiratory and oral health. Quite apart from that, the clue is in the title: disposable vapes. Only 30% of the million or so that are consumed in the United Kingdom every week are recycled, and those that are dumped are littering our communities and environment with their heating elements, lithium batteries and plastic packaging. Those that end up in landfill contribute significantly to the 250 fires a year at landfill sites. There is literally nothing to recommend these abhorrent products, so why does she think that the Tory Government are dithering in this way?

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and am delighted that he is as enraged as I am about the harm that these products are causing. I know that in his community people are equally as concerned as in mine.

His comment bears reflecting upon, because how realistic is it that children will find ways to recycle this disposable product, or so-called disposable product, which is undoubtedly targeted at children, given that they are probably hiding it from their parents in the first place? There are no positive grounds for keeping these things about. I secured a debate last year focusing on the environmental impact, which bears reflecting on. My hon. Friend is right, so I am glad that he made the points that he did.

I am also deeply concerned about the impact on children and young people, because these vapes are so available, so inviting, and so increasingly used by younger people. I am particularly concerned about under-18s. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who opened the debate very powerfully, talked about the Health and Social Care Committee having heard from a headteacher about the significant proportion of children vaping regularly. If we speak to headteachers in any of our constituencies, they will say the same thing. I was also alarmed, though unfortunately not surprised, to hear him highlight issues of primary-aged children vaping. That is terrifying. It is why today's motion needs to be taken seriously.

The Advertising Standards Authority says that “adverts for e-cigarettes must be targeted responsibly”.

I am not sure that that is what is happening. Such ads must, apparently,

“not be directed at under-18s”.

Again, the ASA has a job of work to do there. I wonder, although I suspect that it is perhaps unable to, whether it would want to look at issues such as sports advertising. Blackburn Rovers—other teams may do this, but this is the only team that I am aware of that are doing it—are being sponsored by a vaping retailer, Totally Wicked, for the sixth season in a row. We would find it unacceptable if our football club came out with cigarette branding on their shirts. I cannot understand why it is any more acceptable for a football club to come out with vaping advertising. I am keen for the Minister, or Government Members, to address that.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Would the hon. Lady be similarly outraged to know that the same company supports St Helens rugby football club, and called the stadium Totally Wicked?

Kirsten Oswald: I would be equally outraged. I know how much work the hon. Lady does in this regard. I am unsurprised to find that we are both enraged by the same thing. This is really unacceptable. If we are serious about dealing with the harms to children and young people, we really should expect sports clubs to be somewhere that they can see positive imagery and have positive influences. I recently visited a vaping shop near to where I live. I know they are sold in other outlets too, in corner shops and supermarkets, on Amazon and eBay, and we have heard about them being sold in a barbershop as well. They are not difficult to find, and they are so inviting. When I went into the shop, it looked lovely: the display was beautiful, with nice colours and names and all kinds of fancy shapes that looked like highlighters or lipsticks. I have seen some online that look like brightly coloured fidget spinners. These things are quite enticing, are they not? They are very attractive, and that is obviously deliberate.

I was interested to hear about the King's College study on plain packaging, because anything that makes vapes less attractive to young people is obviously worth considering. I say that for many reasons, one being that I heard recently about young people purchasing disposable vapes to match their outfits. I must say that that had never occurred to me before, but why not? If they are purchasing them, they might want them to match their outfits, just as they might think about what flavour they would like, such as bubblegum or grape soda. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish talked about them looking like an old-fashioned sweet shop, and he was right about that.

Disposable vapes are designed to be enticing, to draw young people in. They are throwaway and they are affordable. The right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) was absolutely right to describe them as pocket-money purchases. Parents will not always know what their children are purchasing with pocket money; presumably children throw disposable vapes away, as I have said, before the parents find them. As parents, we have no idea whether our children are using them. I hope mine are not, but none of us can know that, because they are so easy to find and so easy to throw away that we must be alive to the fact that we might not have the full picture.

Presumably we cannot all have the full picture, because, if we look at the statistics, in a recent YouGov/ASH survey the proportion of children aged between 11 and 17 who vape has gone up from 4% in 2020 to 7% in 2022, and the proportion of children who have tried vaping overall is now sitting at 16%. We have heard significantly higher figures than that cited in this debate.

I think it is reasonable to look for disposable vapes to be removed from sale. That is certainly what I would like to see. I am pleased to hear calls for retailers to ban single-use vapes in Scotland, where environmental and health charities have joined forces to call for an end to the sale of disposable vapes. Groups such as Keep Scotland Beautiful, ASH Scotland and the Marine Conservation Society are urging retailers to follow the good example of Waitrose, who I take my hat off to here, in banning the sale of those single-use products.

Waitrose did that because of reports suggesting that their popularity was soaring among people who had not previously smoked, as we have heard already, including the younger generation. It is really important that we examine the subject. I am pleased about the Scottish Government's action in that regard and I echo Barry Fisher, the chief executive of Keep Scotland Beautiful, who also talks about a “litter emergency” and emphasises that the time to act is now.

The time to act is now also on the illicit vapes we have heard about already—the dodgy vapes and the chemicals within them. Lab research shows that they have up to twice the daily safe amount of lead and nine times the daily safe amount of nickel. There is also chromium in there. We do not want our children to be ingesting those substances, and those studies are based only on some vapes confiscated from a school in England, so we do not know what else is out there; we just know it should not be. Dodgy vapes have deeply concerning health impacts. In Scotland, there have been reports of illegal vapes confiscated from a school that left children coughing up blood. Which of us wants that for our children? We need to act.

[Kirsten Oswald]

It is deeply concerning—and that is before we even get into the notion of young people who have never previously smoked using disposable vapes and then graduating on to smoking cigarettes. We know that is an issue. The producers of vapes would have us believe they were intended to rectify and remedy that very problem, but it turns out to be the opposite that happens. The World Health Organisation has expressed significant concern about that, stating that children who use such products are three times more likely to use tobacco products in the future. If the Minister is looking for evidence, that is the kind of statistic he ought to bear in mind.

Huge profits are being made on the back of all those sales of vapes to children. Big business is being done here, but it is not always being done by the rules. The most popular brand for children is Elfbar, but in July an *Observer* investigation found that Elfbar had flouted the rules to promote its products to young people in the UK. Advertising videos and promotions on TikTok, for instance, were felt to be of concern. Some of those videos attracted hundreds of thousands of views, on a platform that is used by three quarters of 16 and 17-year-olds.

We have already heard about children's doctors calling for a complete ban on disposable vapes. The hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), who is herself a children's doctor, has spoken out about that. If we will not listen to the views of children's doctors about the impact of vapes on children's health, who will we listen to?

I am heartened that Humza Yousaf, our First Minister, says that a ban on disposable vapes is under consideration, and by the incredible hard work being done by the campaign group ASH, which absolutely deserves our thanks. I also thank the organisers of the TRNSMT festival, which took place in Glasgow last weekend, because they did not permit disposable vapes there, and I absolutely applaud them for that.

Less positively, however, I cannot thank the administration of East Renfrewshire Council, which is where I live. The motion, which I think is a good one, includes a passage about working with councils, and that is absolutely right. Of the 32 councils in Scotland, 28 supported motions calling for a ban on disposable vapes. Regrettably, East Renfrewshire Council was not one of them. It did not support the ban, seemingly because a ban was supported by the SNP. I am really unimpressed by that. It is a poor show from that Labour Administration and their Conservative enablers that they could not bring themselves in step with the whole of the rest of the country and, I suspect, with the Members who are present in the debate. That seems somewhat ironic given the motion that is before the House. I hope that they will reflect on that and change their mind, and that we will get a full set of councils to support the ban—although the numbers so far are pretty impressive.

I hope that the Scottish Government come to the conclusion that these things are too dangerous and damaging, although I am grateful for their sterling work so far. I hope that the UK Government will listen to what is being said to them. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), I was not entirely

convinced that a huge degree of listening was going on, but I hope that I am wrong about that and that we will hear about a very serious focus on the matter. The industry will not take the steps that are needed; politicians need to do that. Disposable vapes are a danger to the environment and to our young people. It is high time that we took them off the shelf.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

4.52 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): As the Chair of said Committee, I am very conscious of the importance of these issues, and I am pleased to see them debated in the House. I welcome the debate, but anywhere I have seen this issue debated, including in my cross-party Select Committee—many of its members are here—I do not see an awful lot of politics in it. I have a lot of time for the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), but I thought that he was uncharacteristically partisan in his remarks—a Labour Government this and a Tory Government that. I thought that that was misplaced, but maybe that's just me.

Our Committee heard from the chief medical officer back in February at the start of our major inquiry on prevention. Professor Whitty highlighted then what he called “an appalling situation” whereby vaping, which he described as

“an addictive product with...unknown consequences for developing minds”,

is being marketed to children. I absolutely agree with him that that is totally unacceptable and out of control. As a parent of secondary school-age children, I see, hear and read letters home about the subject in a way that I never imagined I would only a couple of years ago, let alone when I started in this House 13 years ago.

Professor Whitty noted that

“rates of vaping have doubled in the last couple of years among children”,

which is consistent with what we are all hearing as constituency MPs. That situation cannot be allowed to continue, which is why I agree with the part of the Opposition's motion that calls for plain packaging for vaping. The record will show that I most certainly did not vote against new clause 4 to the Health and Care Act, tabled by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy), in November 2021. I support that part of the motion—it is consistent and in line with what happens for cigarettes. I do not think anybody would argue that we should go back to the days of the Marlboro Man and branding on cigarette packets, so I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take that point away.

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way as he is getting into the meat of his speech. Does he share my concerns about the impact that advertising on sports kits could have on any attempts to bring down the number of children vaping?

Steve Brine: Yes, I do. I suspect that point may be raised later in the debate by one of my fellow Committee members, if she catches your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Blackburn Rovers issue has been raised, and it is not a historical sports deal, either: some may think that it was something that happened last season, but they

have renewed it for the new season, which in my opinion is the opposite of “totally wicked”. I have young children who use that expression, and I can see why that would be attractive to a company wishing for Blackburn Rovers to carry its advertising on their shirts—I can only think that is the company’s motivation. I would ask Blackburn Rovers to look themselves in the mirror about that deal as much as the company that is doing the advertising, because it takes two to tango. Yes, I am concerned about that.

A couple of weeks ago, the Health Committee held one of our topical oral evidence sessions on youth vaping. We did so because we are very concerned about increasing media reports of children taking up vaping, as well as what we are hearing in the House and from our own constituents. During that evidence session, we heard from representatives from the health policy world and the medical and education sectors about the impact of the rising trend in child vaping. As was mentioned by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, we heard directly from a headteacher from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson)—a fellow Committee member—about the disruption that vaping is causing in her school. She did indeed talk about the impact on education of students vaping in the toilets and setting off the fire alarms.

We heard about the cost associated with putting heat sensors on top of fire alarm sensors—teachers have got enough to be doing! We heard about the disruption, which has an impact on education. During exam season recently, there were examples of exams being impacted by alarms being set off. As the headteacher told us,

“I became really concerned about interruptions to the exam season, so I had to change the smoke sensors to heat sensors really quickly to prevent us being in and out while students were sitting GCSEs and A-levels.”

That beggars belief. Young people have suffered enough in the past few years, their education has been disrupted enough, and now this—an epidemic of vaping that we are allowing to happen.

I raised the same point with the children’s doctor who gave evidence to the Select Committee. The issue of toileting in schools has wider impacts than just the disruption of education: children do not want to use the toilets, because they do not want to walk into an environment where people are vaping. They are worried about that, so toilets have become off-limits places. There is a much wider issue around toileting in schools and schools closing toilets. There is a very good charity called ERIC that works in the area of children’s bowel and bladder health, and without getting into too much detail, there is an impact on the retentiveness of children who do not use the toilet when they are at school. That can have serious medical implications, so once again, it beggars belief that we find ourselves in this situation because of vaping.

In my opinion, the industry has not gone anywhere near far enough in ensuring that its products do not appeal to the young demographic, and it is disingenuous for it to claim otherwise. Shops are able to display wide ranges of vapes in colourful, flavoured varieties and in locations that do not usually sell similar products: for example, we heard about vapes being sold in chicken shops and pound shops. That is in sharp contrast to

tobacco products, which must be locked away and packaged in standardised plain packaging containing health warnings.

Evidence given to us by ASH from its surveys shows that flavour is a reason but not the main reason why young people who have never smoked start vaping. The most common reason for trying vaping among young never smokers is “just to give it a try”, at 54%, followed by “other people use them so I join in”, at 18%, and then there is “I like the flavours”, at just 12%. It is worth putting that statistic on the record, because there was a bit of a debate earlier between those on the Front Benches about flavours.

I have a few other points. Vapes are an age-controlled product; it is not legal for people under the age of 18 to buy them. There are a number of ways that young people obtain vapes anyway—for example, through the lack of age verification in shops or by buying them from other sellers who are often older teenagers who buy in bulk to sell them on, sometimes in school settings. I know schools take a very tough line on that, and rightly so, but teachers have better things to do than play trading standards officers on campus. We are particularly concerned in the Select Committee about online ordering, which is an area I think would benefit from more Government attention in order to avoid the law being circumvented. Overall, there is a need for much better enforcement of the law on not selling the products to under-18s. It is crucial that trading standards officers tackle non-compliant vendors, and of course are resourced to do so. I know the Minister is seized of that, and he rightly put that in his recent tobacco plan. I say tobacco plan, but I mean the tobacco strategy; as someone who has written a tobacco control plan, I was careful about using that word.

Price is another important issue, particularly the price of disposable vapes, as others have mentioned. They are much cheaper than tobacco products—much cheaper—in part because they are not subject to the same levels of excise duty. I understand that that is clearly not a matter for the Minister on the Front Bench, but maybe he could take that up with his Treasury colleagues. ASH told us that there is evidence that children are highly price-sensitive when it comes to buying these products, and that adding an excise charge of £5 on the battery, which is what we have often heard about, would act as a significant deterrent.

There are a lot of young people in the Gallery, and I wonder what they are thinking listening to this debate. I would urge right hon. and hon. Members to talk to young people, as I am sure we all do, either in their own homes or in the schools in our constituencies, and to ask them their motivation for vaping and what story they know about vaping, because their stories are interesting. I dropped into a vape shop in my constituency just the other day. I made a full disclosure: I told them who I was and that I chair the Health and Social Care Committee. High street vape shops are often very responsible in what they do, and this shop was very clear about how it approaches young people who come in. It told me about a product that basically looked like a bag of Skittles—other nice sweets are available. Skittles took the producer to court and the producer then had to withdraw that product. It does not take a genius to understand why someone might want to brand a vape to look like a bag of Skittles.

[*Steve Brine*]

Popping into vape shops and talking to them about how they do their business is time well spent on a constituency Friday.

To conclude, I have so many serious concerns about disposable vapes and the way they are marketed to children. However, I have to say that I do not support a total ban because, as ASH told the Select Committee in evidence, they can play an important part in helping people to quit smoking. We have to be very careful about a broad-brush ban, but the Government need to step forward even more than they already have, and this debate may help the Minister to form his views. I know he is personally very seized of this issue; he has spoken to me about it on a number of occasions.

The Government need to stay on this issue as an urgent case. A number of friends who also have children at secondary school have asked me, "What are the Government doing about this?" because they know what I do. The concern out there in parent land is growing by the day, and we parents are concerned—very concerned—about this. We on the Select Committee are also very concerned about it, and we will be writing to the Minister and the Secretary of State off the back of our session a couple of weeks ago to set out some of our concerns and some of the recommendations we may make. I hope the Government will take that on board, and come back to us promptly as part of the ongoing consultation the Minister has told us about.

I agree with some of the interventions that have been made. The Khan review was commissioned by the Government and it is a robust piece of work containing with lots of evidence. There is an awful lot to be seized of. I appreciate that it is challenging to get grid slots and get stuff through No.10, but the Prime Minister has personally identified himself with this issue and is concerned about it. I therefore say to the Minister that in that regard he would be pushing at an open door if he banged on a black door with a No.10 on it.

5.5 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I am thankful that those on the Labour Front Bench chose this important topic for debate. We have a policy for and a commitment to a smoke-free future, but it is at risk. In a mere few years, we have paved the way for our children and grandchildren to live healthier, fitter and longer lives. The hard work of doctors, nurses, charities, researchers and activists mean that we are on the edge of creating a future free from the shackles of smoking. That hard work is in serious jeopardy. Smoking still claims the undesirable title of the leading cause of preventable death in the UK, and at current levels, more than half of Britain's 6.6 million smokers will die prematurely. Those are horrifying figures, and when a number of people equivalent to the entire population of Wales will die from smoking, it is clear that we are not moving fast, hard or strongly enough on our smoke-free by 2030 commitment.

As many ex-smokers will know, there is no silver bullet in the fight against smoking. Our strategy must accommodate an integrated approach that understands that targeted social support works with Government regulation—an approach that combines powerful new tools to help current smokers quit, while preventing

children from ever forming this terrible habit. Vaping has its place. It is a tool, but it is only one of them, in the fight to end smoking.

Too much focus on vaping as the answer to cutting smoking risks raising its profile too high, and ultimately attracting more young people. Helping current smokers to quit can be only one aspect of our approach. Without further action to encourage people never to start smoking in the first place, Britain will miss its smoke-free 2030 target by seven years, with the poorest areas missing that target by at least 14 years. When tobacco kills someone in the UK every five minutes, we do not have 14 years to act, never mind 21. I therefore welcome updates on the important work of cracking down on the illicit tobacco trade, and congratulate enforcement agencies on seizing £7 million-worth of illegal tobacco products.

We know there is a strong link between illegal sales and under-age smoking, so tackling the problem at its source is by far the best approach. I am disappointed by the lack of Government plans to tackle the alarming growth in vaping among children. The introduction of vaping products has undoubtedly dramatically improved people's chance of quitting smoking, but the appeal of these products to children is a serious concern. Communities such as mine in Ealing, Southall want and need strengthened trading standards. They want to see regulators able to impose the fines that His Majesty's Revenue and Customs can use. That was a missed opportunity earlier this year; trading standards can only pass evidence to HMRC. By not bringing through that important reform, the Government are providing safe harbour for criminal gangs and organised crime to generate cash.

This illegal and unregulated trade is of serious concern to me, but when the situation demands immediate action, the Government announce a slow consultation. We already have comparable evidence from tobacco products about packaging, flavouring and price points. We know that the branding, flavours and price are targeted at children. When the uptake of vaping among non-smokers is so high, it is baffling that the Government have not acted to make vaping products follow the same trading standards and rules as tobacco. If we are serious about tackling the uptake of vaping by non-smokers, we have to act to regulate and police vaping as we do other tobacco products.

I will briefly go a little off-topic, although the issue is relevant. In communities such as mine, it is not just vaping that is targeted at children. Paan is a serious issue. It is a chewing tobacco product, often sold in corner shops, with nuts, seeds and sweets mixed in for flavour, and it can be picked up for pennies a portion. Because of that and betel, there are terrible statistics on the rates of oral cancers in Asian communities, and anything that reduces those rates will save lives. Yes, we need vaping to help people quit, but only as part of a risk-reduction strategy; making vapes for children, marketing them at children and selling them to children—no.

5.12 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) and to be able to speak in this debate. May I first pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham

(Dr Johnson), who has done so much work on this issue? She is a paediatrician and, frankly, we should always turn to her when looking for advice on vaping. I also pay tribute to a previous Member of this House, Jim Fitzpatrick, who was the Member for Poplar and Limehouse. He has now retired to my constituency—a blessing, although perhaps not an additional vote at the next election. His wife is a cardiologist, and she was talking to me about vaping and the fact that we simply do not know what the health implications might be 20 or 30 years hence. However, it would be an act of gross hypocrisy for me not to confess to liking the odd puff on a vape, and I regard it as an important tool for the cessation of smoking.

We need to be careful when we start discussing things such as flavours. The average vape stick has the most horrific, synthetic, disgusting flavour. They do not taste like strawberry ice, blue raspberry or anything else. They taste weird, but they do not taste as weird as the tobacco-flavoured ones. When I first came to this House—a long time ago now—it was when the tobacco companies were first marketing vaping. The products were almost invariably tobacco-flavoured and tasted disgusting, if we are being brutally honest. I do not know how best to describe them, but they were clunky in design. They were big and chunky and did not fit easily in the pocket. That is where the big difference has come—with cheap, slimline vape sticks, which are much more pocketable and much cheaper.

I really think that price is a two-edged sword. For those looking to stop smoking, there is the sheer fact that vaping disposable bars in particular, which are so cheap and easily obtainable, is really cost-effective. We therefore need to be a little careful and nuanced in looking at how we go about pricing them effectively. It is important that they still be a cost-effective route into smoking cessation, but equally—I made this point to the Minister—we must do something about what I referred to as promotional selling. It is simply not allowed to do two-for-one deals on packets of cigarettes or any other tobacco products—I hasten to add that two-for-one deals are not allowed on things such as baby formula, either—but they are allowed on vape sticks. I know from experience that the village shop sells three Elfbars for £12, making them £4 each, so three kids can easily club together and get a product that is incredibly cheap.

I think the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) referred to the Elfbar as the most popular and one of the most widely accessible vape sticks. I take real offence to the Elfbar name, because I think it sounds somewhat like “health bar”, if not pronounced in quite the same way that I would.

It strikes me that the motion does not address myriad issues. It does not address the naming or pricing of these products. There needs to be some good and effective research on flavours. I am happy to say that these things should be in plain packaging, and they should not be brightly coloured. I do not see what is wrong with a slimline black vape stick—or olive green, which we know has been so effective in the plain packaging of cigarettes.

Tomorrow, I will meet the two headteachers of Romsey School and Mountbatten School. A problem in my constituency is the ease with which children can obtain vape sticks, including—we have heard reference to this—doctored vape sticks. We do not know what is in them.

I think my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), commented on the letters home from school. At the start of the Whitsun half-term week, the two headteachers wrote a letter to parents explaining that children from both schools had been hospitalised because of vape sticks and, to be frank, nobody knew what was in them. One child was suffering from seizures, and they were having an impact on heart rates. Those are really serious health implications that are affecting children.

My hon. Friend mentioned toileting, and I will go there, too—nobody will want to listen to this conversation, but it is important. Way back in 1983, the most terrifying place I ever had to go was the girls’ loos in the main block of Romsey School, where the air was thick with cigarette smoke and hairspray—a unique combination that many male Members of the House will have had no experience of. It is disgusting. We now have a situation where Romsey School has had to introduce alarms because—guess what?—through vaping, it is back, but we cannot smell it.

My mother had the nose of a bloodhound, and if I had had a single cigarette some hours previously, she would sniff it the second I was in the house. If my daughter walks in today, having consumed God knows how many vape sticks, I have no idea that she has done so. The same, of course, is true for teachers, who simply will not know from sniffing children—there are probably all sorts of safeguarding rules why they do not go around sniffing children—whether they have been vaping in the girls’ loos. I suspect that the boys’ loos are also a hotbed of it.

This has massive health implications for children. I remember how, at 11 years old, I would not go to the loo all day because the main block loos were so scary. We do not want to go back to that. We need our children to be able to go to the loo safely and with confidence, and part of that is about making sure that the loos are a safe environment and free of vapes. I pay tribute to my constituent Pete Sandhu, who has developed and indeed marketed a vape alarm, but they are still in the region of £300 to £400 per alarm. I gather that they compare well with an American brand, which is about £1,200 per alarm, but our schools simply cannot afford to be installing such equipment to ensure that pupils are safe while going to the loo.

In addition, I want to mention the levels of nicotine in vape sticks and the nicotine hit. I can talk from experience. The stark reality is that someone will get a far more intense nicotine hit from a disposable vape stick than from a cigarette. That is getting children addicted very quickly.

I speak in defence and support of the Minister; he is right to do a great deal more work on this issue, which we need to be evidence-based. As the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee said, children are very price-sensitive, but I was disappointed to see the issue of price not included in this motion. Clearly, the DHSC needs to have that conversation with the Treasury. We need the pricing to be right so that vaping remains affordable for those of us wanting to quit smoking, but is too expensive for those price-sensitive children to afford.

The places where vapes can be bought, such as hairdressers, beauticians and tanning salons, are inappropriate. We need a robust licensing regime that does not put those products on the ends of supermarket shelves, as I see in my local Morrisons. God bless

[*Caroline Nokes*]

Waitrose—Leckford, the home of the Waitrose estate, is in my constituency. It is a market leader in taking the right and principled stand. In the nearest Morrisons to my constituency—it is not actually in it—vape sticks are on the promotional end of supermarket shelves. Vape companies will have paid more to be in that prime location.

As Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, hon. Members will expect me to make some comment at the end of my contribution—I will not drone on for too much longer—about gender. There has long been a real problem with girls still taking up smoking more than their male counterparts. Some of the packaging and design of Elfbars is gendered—there is an awful lot of pink out there. It is important that any sort of consultation bears in mind that there may be a more targeted marketing strategy towards young women than young men. Please could the Minister bear that in mind?

This is such an important debate and I commend the Opposition for having selected it. I am inclined to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, but I hope the shadow Minister will take my comments in the spirit in which they are intended. I want the idea to be done better, not just trashed. It is an important step, but there is an awful lot more work to do than just ban advertising. That is too simplistic.

5.22 pm

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who made such a common-sense and honest contribution. I think everyone appreciated it.

Colleagues may know that I am a strong advocate for vaping as a way for adults to quit smoking. I am also a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for vaping, so I have a lot of experience of speaking directly with the industry. Much of what I say today comes from what the industry itself is feeling and how it sees the problem of children vaping.

I have seen so many friends, and my late husband, make the switch from being heavy smokers to using—I stress this point—safe vaping products. Every minute, someone is admitted to hospital due to smoking. Someone dies from a smoking-related death every eight minutes. Pertinent to this debate remains the fact that, while not risk-free, vaping is 95% safer than smoking. More than 6.6 million adult smokers in this country have not been able to quit smoking or make the change to vaping. However, I would never advocate that someone who did not smoke or had never tried to smoke take up vaping. That is not the way forward. Vaping must be a way to quit smoking.

Like my colleagues, I support the motion. It is unequivocal that under-18s should not use or have any access to vape products. However, despite the Government's announcement to tackle youth vaping, it remains a major concern. Far more needs to be done to address it, and as we have heard, the trend is at epidemic levels. There is nothing more heartbreaking than walking up the street or being on public transport and seeing very young people at a bus stop or gathered on the street with a vape in their hand. It saddens me, it really does.

Measures are needed specifically to target rogue manufacturers and retailers. Ultimately, no vape should appeal to a minor. Trading standards really needs the resources and the power to enforce the law. A lot of what I am saying is also what the industry is telling me it supports, whether it is the vaping industry or even tobacco firms. I know many people really do not want to hear anything from tobacco firms, but in relation to vaping we should listen to some of the things the industry itself is suggesting.

One of the most effective measures to limit youth access to vapes is surely enforcing strict age verification across all retail channels, including online platforms. Retailers are required by law to operate age verification systems to prevent the sale of vape products to anyone under 18, but some retailers, we know, do not enforce those regulations effectively. Online retailers must also have a stringent age verification process in place to prevent under-18s accessing vape products. We know that retailers can get No ID No Sale! and Challenge 25 resources. They should make use of those resources if it helps them to challenge under-age sales.

The advertising and promotion of vape products is tightly regulated in the UK. However, some irresponsible online and social media marketing can and inevitably does still reach young people, with the results we are now seeing. The Government must strengthen online and social media regulation. No e-cigarettes and e-liquids, including product, packaging and marketing communications, should ever appeal to a child. We could do something about imagery, flavour names and anything else that relates to the world of children and young people, such as comic icons, cartoon characters or sweets. That must be clamped down on. At a minimum, all e-cigarette packaging could be inspected as part of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's notification process before a product can be placed on the market. Law enforcement mechanisms should also be reinforced, with fines and penalties reflecting the seriousness of the offence. This could be achieved by aligning fines with those relating to tobacco products. His Majesty's Revenue and Customs has recently been given the ability to issue on-the-spot fines of up to £10,000. That should be extended to trading standards.

The UK Vaping Industry Association supports all those measures. Recently, John Dunne, the director general of the UKVIA, appeared before the Health and Social Care Committee. He stressed that the Government should take "extreme action" to discourage anyone from selling to children. He reinforced the call for fines of £10,000 per instance, a licensing scheme for vape retailers, robust age verification, and greater powers to check packaging and product designs for potentially child-appealing designs.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker, for arriving midway through the debate. I was speaking at the all-party parliamentary group on suicide and self-harm prevention.

The hon. Lady is making an impassioned speech. On limiting access to young people, when adults go to the counter to buy tobacco products they are behind black and grey metal cabinets. They are not brightly coloured and so on. Would that not be a starting point? We could get vaping products hidden behind those black and

metallic cupboards, so they are not, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) said, all glossy and appealing at the checkout? Would that not be a starting point?

Mary Glendon: I do think it would. I also think vaping products are currently an attraction for shopkeepers to get people into their shops, especially young people—a bit like when alcopops were put on the front shelf. It is brilliant idea and one I hope the Minister will hear. I wish I had thought of it.

John Dunne also urged the Government to look at the new Irish laws, whereby retailers convicted of selling to children can be jailed. Should we go that far?

Since entering the UK in 2021, disposable vapes have come to dominate the market, with 70% of disposable vape sales generated by new users. Children are attracted by their branding, bright colours and sweet flavours. The latest figures from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities show that in England youth vaping has doubled, from 4% to 8.6%. According to the latest figures highlighted by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, more than 138 million disposable vapes are sold every year, and more than one in three products is potentially non-compliant, which means that more than 45 million non-compliant products are being sold each year. Figures have also revealed that in the last six months of 2022, 1.4 tonnes of illegal vapes were seized in, I am ashamed to say, the north-east of England alone. Trading standards officers across the country are doing their best to combat this tidal wave of non-compliant vapes. In March 2002, the tobacco company JTI UK commissioned tests on a variety of popular disposable vapes in the UK, and discovered that 25 out of 28 products were not legally compliant as they all exceeded the e-liquid volume and nicotine strength limits mandated by law.

Although the figures are stark, I do not advocate banning disposable vapes, but regulation must be tightened. For some people on low incomes, disposable vapes are an affordable way to kick the smoking habit. We do not want to send a message that vaping is bad, because we want some of those 6.6 million people to stop smoking by switching to vaping. Despite the Government announcing measures to tackle youth vaping, it is still a major problem and much more needs to be done to combat it. The Government must ensure that regulations are effective in targeting rogue vape producers and retailers, and not the elements of the vaping industry that are trying to sell responsibly to adults. We have to make sure that vaping remains accessible by adults who are trying to stop smoking.

The industry has produced a set of proposals on amending the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 to ensure that all nicotine and non-nicotine e-liquids are regulated in the same way, and that all e-cigarettes and e-liquids, including their product packaging and marketing communications, do not appeal to minors, by prohibiting the imagery we have heard about today. To complement that, all e-cigarette packaging should be inspected as part of the MHRA notification process before products can be put on the market. Law enforcement mechanisms should be reinforced with the fines and penalties that have been suggested, including the £10,000 fine, and the power to impose penalties should be extended to trading standards. That would be a practical way for them to help tackle this problem. We all know

that trading standards need more resources than the Government have promised, given the sheer scale and scope of their work and the specific problem of youth vaping.

The Government have a clear opportunity to address youth vaping with its recent consultation. Clear steps must be taken to ensure that only safe and responsible vapes are available on the market, and that sufficient enforcement measures are in place to ensure that children are not targeted. It is the job of Government, the industry and enforcement agencies to work together to create a regulatory framework that acknowledges the important role vapes play in providing support for adult smokers to quit and prevents their appealing and being accessible to under-18s. The time for action is now. The Minister and the rest of the Government must heed today's debate.

5.34 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): If I may, I would like to ask Members to visualise the following scenario. The world is emerging from a period of economic uncertainty and there is a war in Europe. Young people are being given products that contain nicotine and becoming addicted to nicotine. Unbeknown to them, the products are doing irreversible damage to their young bodies, creating ill health and, indeed, killing more of them than the war in which they are fighting. There is not only the addiction to nicotine but lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and other conditions that have blighted so many lives and taken too many loved ones far too early.

The times that I just described were the times that my father experienced. That was my dad's experience during the second world war. He was given cigarettes as part of his rations as a radar operator in the RAF serving in India and Burma. Through the magical world of time travel, colleagues are now in the 21st century, 80 years on in 2023, looking at the same type of young person, aged 18 and younger, and what do we find? The world is struggling with economic uncertainty and there is a war in Europe. Yet again, we find that many young people are being given free samples of products that contain nicotine—vaping products. Vapes are causing addiction to nicotine, and I dread to think of the other detrimental impacts on young people's health. We have not learned the lessons of 80 years ago.

Vapes should not be used as a recreational product or, as I described them yesterday, as confectionery. Vapes should only ever be used as an aid to stop smoking. I remind the House that it is illegal to sell cigarettes to under-18s. As I just indicated, vapes are an aid to quit smoking for adults and should never be seen in the hands of children, yet that is not the case. Like others, time and again I see children—and yes, they are children—with a variety of multicoloured vapes in their hands as they leave school at the end of the day. They are leaving schools that do not have sixth forms, so they are definitely not 18. Legally, they should not be able to access vapes, yet they can and regularly do.

What is going wrong? Why have vapes become a fashionable accessory that contains what I believe to be one of the most addictive and dangerous substances known to man? I would now like Members to visualise their high streets. We may have lost many of our corner shops and the traditional tobacconists with packs and

[Maggie Throup]

packs of cigarettes stacked up behind the counter and, as we have heard, where they do still exist they are heavily regulated, with cigarettes hidden behind screens and in plain packaging, yet they have been replaced with brightly lit shops stacked full of multicoloured vaping products. The product placement and design is second to none, with modern interiors and the minimalistic look that is so attractive to youngsters. It is like candy to the eyes of young people as they walk past on their way to school.

What does this situation say about us? How have we allowed this to happen again? The tobacco industry, starved of its traditional revenue, is now seeking new victims by ploughing billions of pounds into the vaping industry, and it is doing that without clear, long-term scientific evidence of what vaping is doing to the young people who have been influenced by the tobacco industry's sleek marketing. This must stop, and it must stop now. We cannot allow vaping to become the new cigarettes. Far too many of us have seen the consequences of smoking and we must not allow history to repeat itself.

For that reason, I have five requests of my hon. Friend the Minister. First, we should update both the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 and the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion (Brandsharing) Regulations 2004 to cover vaping products. Secondly, we should amend the Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 to prohibit the sale of flavoured vaping liquid. Thirdly, will my hon. Friend look carefully at the case for outlawing the sale of tobacco and vaping products within a defined radius of schools? Fourthly, we should ensure that the ban on the sale of vaping products to those under the age of 18 is properly and rigorously enforced by trading standards. Finally, I urge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to specifically target vaping products in his next Budget statement, to disincentivise the recreational habit through the tax system. Only then can we truly claim to be a world leader in protecting the health of our nation.

5.39 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I declare my interest as a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health. I thank the Labour Front Bench for choosing this topic as their second debate on their Opposition day today.

I welcome the motion, which gives a clear indication that the shadow Front Bench and the next Labour Government take this issue seriously. Given Labour's polling right now, I think this will be policy next year, if not before.

I have repeatedly made clear my concern about the need to tackle youth vaping. In 2021, as we have heard, I tabled amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill to standardise the packaging of vapes. These amendments would have removed child-friendly branding and prohibited free distribution—in other words, free samples—to children. As Members may recall, the amendments had strong cross-party support. However, the Government did not adopt my amendments. In fact, they voted against them, and I am still in the dark as to why. Perhaps the Minister might explain in winding up.

Nevertheless, the Government must take forward these measures without further delay, because marketing addictive substances to children is unethical. Although it is vital to strengthen regulation on vaping, we must not forget that smoking still remains a far greater risk. Smoking is killing too many of our loved ones. There have been 117,000 smoking-related deaths in the north-east since the turn of the millennium. This is a public health emergency, and the Government are dithering yet again. We have waited since 2017 for the promised update to the tobacco control plan. We heard, just a few weeks ago, Ministers' proposals for achieving their smoke-free 2030 ambition. They will not achieve it because their proposals do not go far enough and their actions are not bold enough. As we have heard, the Khan review found that we will miss the target by at least seven years without bold action. In the poorest areas of the country, the target will not be reached until 2044.

We must encourage as many smokers as possible to quit their use of cigarettes, the most lethal consumer product, by any means that suit them, including the use of nicotine vapes. The Association of Directors of Public Health North East has made its position on vaping very clear, reassuring both the public and healthcare professionals that vaping poses only a fraction of the risks of smoking while, at the same time, stating clearly that vapes should not be accessible or appealing to young people.

Three quarters of adults in Great Britain support measures to prohibit vapes that appeal to children and the promotion of vapes in shops, which is currently legal. We have a lot of evidence to support the fact that vapes play a very important role in helping adult smokers to quit, but they should never be marketed towards children. As I mentioned earlier, marketing an addictive substance to children is unethical. Let us remember that nicotine carries health risks. Vaping may be preferable to tobacco as a cessation aid, but we have to remain vigilant to the risks to oral and respiratory health.

Underage vaping has increased by 50% over the past three years, and it is happening under the Government's watch. They have had several opportunities to act: I tabled amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill; the Khan review was based on research and evidence; and ASH, Fresh, Cancer Research UK and others have provided evidence. There is no excuse for this delay. The first duty of a Government is to protect their citizens; Ministers are failing in their duties to our young people. Since Conservative Members voted down Labour's amendments to tackle youth vaping, countless children have no doubt fallen victim to the disgraceful and unethical marketing of vapes allowed by this Government. How many more children must become addicted to nicotine before Ministers finally take action?

5.44 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I welcome this debate on a hugely important issue that gives rise to related concerns. Recent research shows that 24% of children have used a vape and 11% of secondary school pupils would describe themselves as regular vape users. The data that has been disclosed in today's article in *The Northern Echo* reveals that nearly 100,000 children in the north-east have tried vaping. Those figures should be of great concern to all of us.

First, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) for the amazing work she has done on this issue. She is my longest friend in politics and I wholeheartedly support her ten-minute rule Bill to prohibit the sale of disposable e-cigarettes. She is right in seeking to end the problems caused by these products. If they were simply used to wean smokers off cigarettes, they would be doing their job, but we know from the debate that they are doing far more harm than that. One key point that she has raised is that although vaping manufacturers often insist that their products are intended for adults only, they design their products with descriptions, colourings and flavourings that, as we have heard, appeal to a far more impressionable audience.

One of my biggest concerns is that we simply do not know the long-term effects of vaping, as e-cigarettes are very new. Let us not forget that there once was a time when cigarettes were considered safe. We know that e-cigarettes or vapes contain carcinogens, cytotoxins and genotoxins. A recent freedom of information request found that vaping-related hospital admissions almost doubled last year, with 32 of those cases involving children. The simple fact is that we do not know how bad the problem is.

I know that children's vaping is a serious concern in my constituency, where parents are increasingly worried that children are being targeted by brands, with social pressures resulting in more children becoming addicted. At the beginning of this year, Darlington Borough Council began a crackdown on the trade of illegal tobacco and vape products. It began under the previous Conservative administration in Darlington and I hope that its work will continue under the new Labour and Liberal Democrat administration. As a result of that crackdown, a huge amount of counterfeit tobacco and fake vape products were seized, and numerous premises have either been closed down or are under further investigation. Sadly, this is like a case of whack-a-mole: one trader is stopped and another two replace them. Whether we are talking about underage sales or child exploitation, using vapes as a reward, or using children as couriers, we should be acutely aware of the risk to young people in our community from those who would engage in such criminal activity. There is a concern that criminals have now latched on to this market of illicit products to undercut legitimate goods, with a network of organised criminals operating in the background to feed the vaping issue.

I wish to highlight to the House the issue raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) about the location of vaping products in Southampton. In conversation with me, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) highlighted concerns raised in his community about the siting of vapes in a supermarket. He launched a campaign in his constituency to have those relocated. He tells me that it was well met by the supermarket, so there is perhaps a lesson for us all to raise that issue in our respective local community supermarkets.

Local trading standards teams, such as those in Darlington, rely on local information and intelligence to tackle the issue of purchases of illegal and fake products. I urge everybody to encourage those in their communities to report such issues to trading standards departments.

We must stop children from vaping. My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham's proposal to ban disposable electronic cigarettes is excellent, and I hope that her Bill is successful.

Dr Hudson: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech articulating the risks of vapes in terms of the public health of our young people and the environmental concerns with their disposal, but we are also seeing increasing issues with animals. When I was out walking my young dog, Poppy, the other day, she went into the undergrowth and came out with a bright pink, melon-flavoured disposable vape. She was just about to crunch it and swallow it, when I took it out of her mouth. I shudder to think what would have happened if she had crunched and swallowed it, because it was a foreign body, containing a battery and toxic compounds. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that we just do not know the risks to people, the environment and animals?

Peter Gibson: As an expert on animals, my hon. Friend will be acutely aware of the risks to animals of ingesting a battery. We know there are concerns about the disposal of vaping products. He leads me to recall the campaign led by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) on button batteries; this debate highlights similar issues.

I believe that the time has come for us to consider licensing the retail sale of tobacco products as a means of tackling those traders engaged in the sale of illegal, fake and contraband tobacco and nicotine products. We know such sales fuel organised crime gangs, so licensing is another way of cutting off that money supply.

Finally, I ask the Government to consider a cross-departmental strategy, across the Department of Health and Social Care, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education, and working with local authorities, to ensure that we have the right legislation in place to tackle these challenges, including the correct disposal and recycling of all the paraphernalia.

5.52 pm

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friends on the Front Bench for choosing this important topic for debate.

I recognise that encouraging the use of e-cigarettes is a vital part of the Government's strategy for a smokefree 2030. I am a member of the Health and Social Care Committee, and two weeks ago I listened to the expert panel and heard some of their disturbing evidence. It is worrying that the risks associated with vaping are still unclear, as long-term studies do not exist.

I was a nurse for 25 years. Believe me, there is no one who wants to support effective public health measures as passionately as I do, but I am concerned. It is illegal to sell vapes containing nicotine to anyone under the age of 18, but, in 2021, over 20% of children aged 11 to 15 had tried vaping. Clearly, something is not working. At the Health and Social Care Committee, I asked the panel about banning vape sticks, but was struck by the answer that banning them would drive them underground, which worried me.

One secondary school in my constituency told me:

"Vaping has massively increased with children—they are too easy to obtain and the negative consequences are not fully appreciated by the children. Vapes are also being used as a method of supplying harder drugs, which is a wider issue across our estate."

[Mrs Paulette Hamilton]

Forty children and young people were admitted to hospital in England last year owing to vaping-related disorders. We have all seen reports about some of the terrible symptoms that they have experienced, from seizures and shortness of breath, to hypertension and high blood pressure. The Khan review, published last year, recommended that the Government do everything they possibly can to prevent children and young people from vaping.

If Conservative Members are really committed to doing everything they possibly can, they could start by fixing the mess that they have created in the NHS and attempting to make new records, rather than those they are currently achieving for the longest waiting list, the highest vacancies and the most disruptive delays. Doctors and nurses are working incredibly hard, but there are just not enough of them. Vital spaces in hospital beds across the country are being taken up by people who cannot access mental health or social care services and so cannot be discharged.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health warned that youth vaping is becoming an epidemic and that the number of children admitted to hospital as a result of vaping has almost quadrupled in two years. Our NHS cannot afford for the Government not to take this issue seriously.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall say this until I am blue in the face: public health is chronically underfunded and prevention is key. If we cannot stop children vaping once they have started, we need to make sure that they never start in the first place. The potential risks associated with vaping, especially for children living under a Conservative Government who are set on wrecking our NHS, are just too great. We need a Government who will prioritise prevention and support the NHS to take this issue seriously before the problem escalates any further.

5.57 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I thank the Labour Front-Bench team for a great choice of debate today. I thank, too, all those Members who have made nice comments about me today. I agree with the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who said that it is a shame to see children's health being made a party political issue, because surely everybody in this House, from every party, wants children's health to be as good as possible. In that vein I declare an interest as both a consultant paediatrician and a member of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

I was pleased to see the shadow Minister talk about Laranya Caslin, the headteacher of St George's Academy in Sleaford, who spoke so eloquently at the Select Committee about her experiences of children vaping in her school. Let me reflect on some of the things that she said. She said that there was heavy peer pressure in school encouraging children to vape. She said that vaping was seen to be cool and that children had to vape to feel that they were part of the in-group. She also talked about how it has a higher burden of addiction. She said that, sometimes, children would go out at break time to have a cigarette, or to share a cigarette with friends, but now they vape not just during break times but need to top up

during lessons. That continual top-up is something that we see in Parliament, too. Yesterday, while eating in the Tea Room, a Member of the House was vaping at the table. It must be said that we did have quite a long session of votes yesterday. During voting, in the Labour Members' cloakroom, a Member of the Opposition Front Bench was sat vaping. We are seeing people topping up anywhere and everywhere it would seem, and that is something that I would like to see stop.

As many Members have mentioned, the flavours and colours of vapes are very child-friendly: there are even unicorn flavours, which I struggle to believe are directed at teenagers, never mind adults. My 12-year-old would not thank you for anything with a unicorn on, because that is very much for younger children. Indeed, we saw in the Healthwatch survey that 11% of 10 and 11-year-olds are already vaping. That grew to 42.4% of 16 to 17-year-olds, with a gradual increase during the teenage years. Laranya Caslin also told us that flavours are important to the peer pressure on children to vape. She talked about how children would discuss, "Have you tried the cherry cola? Have you tried the unicorn milkshake? Have you tried the green gummy bear?" It is the flavours that enable that discussion to take place among peers, which encourages children.

I asked the industry representative, "Why do you need these flavours? Why can't you make them basic mint flavour, no flavour at all, or tobacco flavour?" He said that when people smoke they lose their sense of taste to an extent. Indeed, the NHS website says that one of the benefits of stopping smoking is that after 48 hours a sense of taste will start to return. What the industry has found, it told me, is that if it has tobacco or plain flavoured vapes, people will move off smoking on to the vape, but when their tastebuds return they will not like the vape anymore and will discontinue their vape use. That is of course what we want them to do, but it is perhaps not what the industry wants them to do. Making it cherry cola flavoured, bubble gum flavoured, or whatever flavour the person likes to inhale means that they will continue to be addicted to that product and continue to use it. I encourage the Minister to consider that when she considers banning flavours, or which flavours should be allowed to be used.

The ten-minute rule Bill that I introduced on 8 February this year would have banned disposables. I understand that the Minister has challenges in defining a disposable in a way that the industry, which has such a heavy financial interest in the product, cannot get around and make the legislation weak quickly. I look for an update in how that is going, but 1.3 million are disposed of every week. We have heard already about the fires that they can cause, and the fact that most of them are not recycled. I understand that they are very difficult to recycle, because the nicotine salts leak into the plastic. It is not like a plastic water bottle, which can be easily recycled if it is disposed of properly. These vapes cannot be, because they become a hazardous waste, because the nicotine has leaked into the plastic itself.

Kirsten Oswald: The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that the whole way these things are designed seems as if it is to prevent them from being recycled? They are impossible to take to bits. They contain, as she said, plastic, which is then infused with other substances. There are lithium batteries, and all manner

of things. How would one possibly go about recycling that properly? I think that the answer is that one could not unless one were a specialist.

Dr Johnson: The hon. Lady is right: these things are incredibly difficult to recycle, and since 70% of children use disposable vapes, and they are the most attractive and cheapest for children to use, it is increasingly important that we ensure that they are not available. The call to ban disposables has been backed by a wide variety of people, including the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, of which I am a member, the Children's Commissioner, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. There is a widespread desire across all parties, and across communities, to see these products banned.

The industry said at the Select Committee that a ban will drive the industry underground and make things illicit, but as we heard from the hon. Lady earlier, that is already happening. There are already illicit vapes. When a school in my constituency confiscated five vapes and the police tested them, they found antifreeze and all sorts of products, including trichloroethylene, which was banned before I was born. All those types of products are contained in vapes already, so that cat is very much already out of the bag and should not dissuade us from getting rid of these disposable products.

We also heard on the Health and Social Care Committee about the health challenges. We hear that vapes are 95% safer than smoking. The industry continues to repeat that statistic. Where does it come from? How could anyone possibly quantify that? It comes from 2013, when a group of people who were not specifically experts in tobacco control got together and had a discussion. They then published a paper. Let me read something that was published in *The Lancet* at the time, which was more than 10 years ago. The editorial of *The Lancet* said:

"But neither PHE nor McNeill and Hajek report the caveats that Nutt and colleagues themselves emphasised in their paper. First, there was a 'lack of hard evidence for the harms of most products on most of the criteria'. Second, 'there was no formal criterion for the recruitment of the experts'. In other words, the opinions of a small group of individuals with no prespecified expertise in tobacco control were based on an almost total absence of evidence of harm. It is on this extraordinarily flimsy foundation that PHE based the major conclusion and message of its report."

The Lancet also noted that

"one of the authors of the Nutt paper...reports serving as a consultant to...an e-cigarette distributor",

and that another

"reports serving as a consultant to manufacturers of smoking cessation products."

In the Westminster Hall debate on 29 June I asked the Minister to look further into the veracity of the claim that vaping is 95% safer, and whether, given that that study was 10 years ago, the modern evidence for that still stacks up. I look to the Minister for an update on how they are getting on with that, because we heard in the Health and Social Care Committee that there are significant health impacts for children, with eight children hospitalised from St George's Academy in Sleaford alone.

We also heard about children being frightened to go into toilets, as the Select Committee Chair said. Some of those children were frightened to do so because they found that when they did, it triggered their asthma symptoms.

Those are children who do not vape, but who have asthma and are frightened to go into the toilets because there is so much vaping vapour left in the toilets by other children that it is triggering their asthma and making them unwell. Some of these children are unable to go to the toilet all day, which leads them to have problems not only with asthma, but with urinary retention, which potentially leaves them at risk of urinary infection and incontinence issues in later life. It is for that reason that Dr Stewart from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health told us that she supported a ban on the use of vaping in public places.

I would also like the Minister to look at the use of accessories. On Etsy.com today, under the categories "girly smoking accessories" or "cute smoking accessories", for £7.78—within the pocket money range—one can buy a teddy bear vape stand. It is a tiny teddy bear that people can stand their vape in when they are not using it. Will the Minister look at whether such items are suitable for sale, given that they are essentially there to attract children to this activity?

Moving on to advertising, we have a bizarre situation where Transport for London banned an advert for "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" that initially featured a picture of a three-tier wedding cake, because it would encourage people to eat fat, salt and sugar and that might drive the obesity crisis. That was on the tube, yet TfL buses have many adverts for vaping, including ones that appear to me personally to make vaping look cool and something to be aspired to.

I think TfL's priorities are all wrong. The London Bus Advertising group states, as part of the group's advertising to encourage people to put their adverts on the buses, that 5.8 million people would see the buses per week. I would ask those on the shadow Front Bench to use their good offices with the Labour Mayor of London to consider whether he can influence the chair of TfL to remove not just cake adverts, but vaping adverts from places such as tubes, buses and taxis, where they may be seen by children.

In the Minister's opening remarks he talked about tobacco track and trace, and I wonder whether he is planning to bring in the same for vaping.

The other thing I want to talk about is taxation. Other hon. Members have talked about the price of disposable vapes and how they are accessible with pocket money. Very rarely comes an opportunity for a Chancellor to bring in a tax that will promote the public's health, still make vaping cheaper than smoking, protect our children's health and be relatively popular, yet raise revenue. While we wait to ban the disposable versions, I encourage the Chancellor to consider adding at the next fiscal event perhaps £5 to the price of a vape, to move them out of the pocket money range.

In summary, the Minister needs to look at a whole range of measures to challenge children's vaping, including price, location, sale and use, colours, flavours, disposable items, advertising, education and enforcement.

6.9 pm

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): I join Members from across the House in expressing concern about the way in which vaping is marketed to, and taken up by, children.

[Richard Foord]

We have heard that vaping is a useful tool to help people to quit smoking, and that it is safer than smoking tobacco and cuts down the chances of developing conditions such as cancer. However, the Liberal Democrats are deeply concerned by the rise and prevalence of single-use disposable vapes, which are explicitly targeted at young people, be it through the use of brightly coloured advertisements, a range of playful colours or their placement near the front of supermarkets. We must ensure that young people do not become addicted to those products, and that vapes do not become a gateway to smoking. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who, during her excellent speech, referred to the location of vape bars in supermarkets. I will expand on that point by talking a little about my own experience of it.

A few months ago, a parent of a student at Tiverton High School in Devon reached out to me as he was deeply concerned by the rise in the theft of vapes from our local Morrisons supermarket, which is just a short walk from Tiverton High School, making it easily accessible before and after school, and perhaps during lunch breaks. I visited the store and found that the vape stand was indeed right next to the shop entrance, offering a range of single-use disposable vapes. My staff spoke to the staff at the store, and it emerged that that spot was, yes, chosen by the vendor. The vendor specifically insisted on the vape stand being at the front of the shop in that way, and paid extra for it. As is the case in other supermarkets, the security team were not regularly stationed by the front of the shop, so it seemed ludicrous to me and my team that those products were placed so close to the door and left unprotected.

We took up the cause and campaigned with community representatives, including those from Tiverton High School, and spoke with staff from Morrisons to get that changed. After a short investigation, the store offered first to have a security guard stand next to the vape stand, but clearly, that was not enough. I am pleased to say that, after a lot of pressure, the vapes are now kept safely behind security doors, which are locked during school opening and closing periods on weekdays, meaning that vapes can be bought only from the kiosk.

That is very welcome news. I thank and pay tribute to Frazer Gould, from my part of Devon, who raised this issue with me. I do not think it should take a constituent lobbying a Member of Parliament, and that Member of Parliament getting directly involved, to ensure that those addictive products are not left openly accessible to young people.

Kirsten Oswald: The hon. Member is making an excellent speech. It is very helpful of him to point out the constructive actions of his constituent in this regard, although he is correct to say that it is we who should act. We should appreciate all the constituents of ours who are very focused on this, including my constituent Laura Young, who has done so much work to try to get vapes off our streets.

Richard Foord: I am grateful to the hon. Member. I also pay tribute to other constituents of mine: many of the young people who attend Tiverton High School. I do not want to mischaracterise them as people who are only out to steal vape bars from the supermarket at

lunch times. I have been to that school several times, and there are some brilliant pupils there. Many of them are aware of the risks of becoming addicted to vape bars.

The campaigners, the high school and my team have worked with Morrisons and we have got that arrangement in place, but that is clearly just one arrangement with one supermarket. What we definitely need to do is think about single-use vape bars in the round. It is clear that we need to ban the sale of single-use disposable vapes, clamp down on the appealing packaging and the advertising of those products, and ensure that the shameless vaping companies cannot get our children hooked on those addictive devices.

6.13 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): One of the great pleasures of being tail-end Charlie in these debates is that one has the opportunity to sit through and listen to every contribution. The disadvantage is getting nudged to hurry up by those on the Front Bench. So, I have torn up my original speech, Madam Deputy Speaker, and will focus instead on the bits from the contributions of others that you did not have the opportunity to hear yourself.

There have been lots of interesting suggestions on how we can solve this problem, which we all agree needs to be addressed. I am a father of teenage children as well, and I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine). I have experience of my own children's friends using vapes—their friends, I hasten to add.

Kirsten Oswald: That's what they all say!

Jerome Mayhew: As the hon. Lady says, that is what they all say. Obviously that is wholly inappropriate, but part of the problem in reaching the correct solution to this shared concern has been demonstrated by the richness of the debate we have had today.

All sorts of suggestions have been made. My non-exhaustive list indicates that some hon. Members said that we should ban flavours. Some of them said that we should ban all flavours; others said that we should ban only flavours that are targeted directly at young palates. There have been suggestions that we should ban disposable vapes, or that we should require bland packaging for vapes, although others suggested that the issue is not so much the packaging as the fact that they should be hidden behind closed doors. There has been a suggestion that we should increase the cost of vapes, but that was controversial—the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) rightly pointed out that for adults seeking to give up smoking who are on very limited means, the cost of vapes is a very relevant consideration.

Dr Caroline Johnson: The cost is indeed important, both in pricing children out of the pocket money market and in ensuring that smokers who are seeking to quit can do so. However, to a smoker who can afford a packet of cigarettes, even if £5 is put on the cost of a disposable vape, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) described, the vape is still cheaper.

Jerome Mayhew: I am grateful for that intervention. I do not have skin in the game about whether it is better to have a higher cost or a lower cost, but my hon.

Friend's intervention has highlighted my fundamental point, which is that this is a complex area where we need evidence to base our policy on.

It has been suggested that we should crack down on marketing. Others have suggested that we should increase education in schools, and there is a wider debate about schools policy and the use of loos in schools. There are other concerns, overriding all of these, about what impact our actions in relation to vapes—including single-use vapes—could have on the ability of adults to give up smoking, in order to continue the downward trend of smoking addiction in this country. These are serious and interrelated issues. If this debate were to result in a Division, there is no way that I could support the Labour motion, which focuses solely on banning branding and advertising for the young, because it may not go far enough. It may just focus on one little area, when the richness of the debate on both sides has highlighted how much wider and more complex the issue is.

As such, what we are really talking about is not so much our concerns about vaping, including by children: the main issue is, "How should we make our law?" It is a given on both sides of the Chamber that action should be taken, and the first speech on behalf of the Government, made by the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) made it clear that the Government have already acted and are intending to go further. In fact, the Secretary of State said at Health questions yesterday that the Government were looking to go further, particularly on single-use disposables. It is not a question of whether we are going to act: the question is, on what basis do we act? For my money, we should act on the evidence and not solely on anecdote, important though that is.

Kirsten Oswald: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I would gently say that the hon. Lady has made a long contribution, and I do have two other speakers to get in. That is the only problem.

Jerome Mayhew: Thank you for that indication, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To wrap up my submissions, I will say that the Government are absolutely right to have put out a call for evidence. That evidence has now been obtained, last month, and the Government should take every second that is needed to assess it and come up with draft proposals, but not a second longer, because this is a very important issue. As a parent, I share the concerns that have been expressed across the House. We need to address this issue—we cannot waste time—but we should do so based on the evidence.

6.19 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I draw attention to my role as a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health.

Perhaps I could start my speech with a quiz, although I do not really want any answers because that would in effect name killer cigarettes. No. 1: which brand is promoted here?

"Give your throat a vacation...Smoke a fresh cigarette".

That brand was promoted with a picture of an ear, nose and throat specialist holding what was described as a "germ-proof" pack of cigarettes as he had tested the brand's ability to filter the

"peppery dust...that makes you cough."

No. 2: Cigares De Joy makes the claim that these cigarettes benefit those suffering from

"asthma, cough, bronchitis, hay-fever, influenza & shortness of breath".

No. 3, and I will name this one for context: Eve, the cigarette for the "feminine woman", packaged in a box with a floral design, with ads claiming:

"Flowers on the outside. Flavor on the inside."

I remember the former Member for Broxtowe, Anna Soubry, speaking of the sophisticated, long, slimline menthol cigarettes that were a passion in her days.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of other adverts promoting cigarettes that we can see online today. Yes, there is cigarette advertising selling the health benefits or the glamorous, sophisticated femininity of a killer product that we all know would never be allowed to be manufactured if someone came up with the idea today. The laws, over the years, have put those ads into the past, but the tobacco companies have always been very clever in their marketing. Let us be in no doubt but that, for generations, they have always had their eye on the next generation of smokers, with children very much in their sights. Now we have e-cigarettes, many of them manufactured by the same tobacco companies, which are becoming increasingly popular with children and young people. When I drive past local secondary schools, it is common to see young people—it appears more girls than boys—sucking away on one of these devices. The advertising of them is a real throwback to those days I have described, when cigarettes were sold as healthy, sophisticated products that everybody should use.

Yesterday, at Health and Social Care questions, I asked the Secretary of State why he has not acted to stop the new range of advertisements for e-cigarettes featuring gummy bears and Skittles, with bright colours and cartoon characters on packaging and labelling, by adopting Labour's amendment—that of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy)—to the Health and Care Bill to ban such advertising. He answered that

"we have already taken action. We took measures in April, and the Prime Minister announced further measures in May. We are keen to follow the evidence. That is why we have had a call for evidence. The ministerial team are looking extremely closely at this, and we will take further action to clamp down on something that we all recognise is a risk to children, which is why we are acting on it."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 2023; Vol. 736, c. 156.]

But he is not acting on advertising. He could put a stop to it now. I take issue with people who say that this is not a political issue, because Ministers have taken what I can only describe as a political choice to do nothing in this space. The Minister asked my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) for specific things that need to be done. Well, an advertising ban is very specific.

Peter Gibson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Cunningham: No, I will not.

[Alex Cunningham]

Yes, something may change in the future, but we need action now. I think the Immigration Minister would probably agree with us—he had the cartoon characters in a detention centre painted over because they were too welcoming and attractive. I will not condone that callous approach to children by the Immigration Minister, but I am sure he would agree that such attractive things should be removed from vape advertising and packs.

I well remember my original ten-minute rule Bill and other Back-Bench Bills to outlaw smoking in cars with children present. Ministers refused to back the measure, even though 600,000 children every day had to share their driver's smoke. Three years later, the Health Minister, the then MP for Battersea, proposed her own amendment. To be fair, she did acknowledge my work and that of organisations such as the British Lung Foundation, Action on Smoking and Health, and Fresh. The Minister said then that the Government were following the evidence, but there had been years of it, and we do not need any more evidence for the Secretary of State to follow in relation to the advertising of e-cigarettes. It is already plain to see.

Peter Gibson: The hon. Gentleman is making an impassioned speech, which includes a great deal of discussion about advertising. Would he care to comment on the advertising for vapes on London buses?

Alex Cunningham: That is an interesting question. I would not personally want to see the advertising of vapes on London buses, particularly if they appeal to children.

It has been plain that manufacturers are directly targeting young people. I do not know whether gummy bears and Skittles are akin to the claimed glamour and sophistication of cigarettes, but the advertising is promoting a product with the kind of modern images that appeal to youngsters. We must not forget that e-cigarettes have their place, but that is as an adult quitting aid, not a child's toy or sweet substitute.

In my area, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust now includes vapes as part of its adult in-patient tobacco dependency treatment service. Vapes are offered as part of a wider toolkit of treatments available to those who smoke on admission to hospital, alongside nicotine replacement therapy and specialist behavioural support. Patients are provided with support to remain smoke-free during their hospital admission, and following discharge home. Reducing exposure to second-hand smoke has been a priority of mine for many years, and led to that ban on smoking in cars with children present in 2015.

We have known for a long time that breathing in tobacco smoke concentrated in enclosed places is harmful, and at its worst deadly, particularly when children are involved. For parents and carers addicted to nicotine, replacing cigarettes with vapes can substantially reduce the risks to their children. However, promoting vapes to adults as a quitting aid should not go hand in hand with the dreadful marketing of vapes to children. Requiring standardised packaging for vapes is essential, and the Government can be reassured that that has strong public and political support. Indeed, it may not be a political issue, because Members across the House support it.

The overwhelming majority of the public would like us to go further and ban all advertising and promotion in shops, which is currently unregulated.

When I walk into shops in my local constituency—I am sure I am not alone in this—e-cigarettes are promoted everywhere. As others have said, vapes are thrust in children's faces in all kinds of shops, at the till or by the sweets, which is totally unacceptable. When the Government respond to the consultation on youth vaping in the autumn, I urge them to commit to bringing forward legislation to ban not just the child-friendly branding of vapes, but their in-store promotion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish said, we must not forget the issue of smoking itself, which is still the leading cause of premature death and inequalities in healthy life expectancy across society. Smoking does not just damage people's health; it undermines our nation's productivity, costing more than £20 billion a year to our public finances for health, social care and social security.

I know that the Minister is committed to achieving the Government's smoke-free 2030 ambition, and I welcomed the measures announced earlier this year to support smokers to quit with free vapes, and to provide additional support to help pregnant smokers quit. However, those were only a tiny proportion of the measures recommended by the independent review that the Government commissioned from Javed Khan, to provide advice on how to achieve the smoke-free ambition. Indeed, the funding was only a quarter of that called for by Javed Khan, and the commitment was for only two years. Meanwhile, big tobacco continues to make extreme profits by selling highly addictive, lethal products. A levy on the industry is popular, feasible, and supported by voters of all political persuasions, as well as by the majority of tobacco retailers. The manufacturers have the money, and they should be made to pay to end the epidemic.

In a debate in the House on 20 June on the smoke-free 2030 ambition, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) asked the Minister to explain how, when and where the Government will find the additional funding needed to deliver that ambition without a commitment to a levy on tobacco manufacturers. He received no answer, so I hope the Minister will answer that question today. Finally, I ask again: will the Minister bring forward the necessary legislation to end the child-targeted advertising of e-cigarettes? Ministers know that is the right thing to do.

6.28 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Twenty-nine years ago I handed in my dissertation for my degree. It was focused on tobacco advertising, and the very arguments being made today by the industry were being made back then as to why it was so important that advertising should not be prohibited further. That is why today's debate should be as much about the business model, driven by the industry, as about the harm from these products to children and young people. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) on bringing this motion before the House, because the timing is so important. Some 30% of children and young people across Yorkshire have already tried vaping and we know, as we move into that summer period, that more and more children will be socialising outside of school time, and those risks will go up, as will the number of adults we see vaping.

I was honoured to sit on the Health and Social Care Committee as we took evidence from the industry, health professionals and an articulate headteacher talking about their experiences. What I have to say back is that over the past 29 years, we have seen an industry that has become far cannier in how it advertises and markets its products than it was in yesteryear. The situation calls on the Government to step up and be far cannier in being able to expediently put in place the full range of measures that we know will have an impact on the number of young people taking up vaping.

We welcome the reduction in the number of children smoking cigarettes, and we have seen that important shift over the decades. We know the measures that have levered that in—increasing the cost has certainly had an effect, and making smoking less accessible and less attractive has had an impact—but what also needs to be learned is that the very mechanisms put in place around cigarettes need to be applied immediately to vaping, too.

If we look at some of the measures introduced over the past 20 years, we have seen the billboards taken down along with newspaper and magazine advertising, the removal of tobacco from promotions, its removal from sport, its access taken away in shops, the shutters put down, vending machines taken away and these products being put out of use. There were also important public health measures to move away from indoor smoking and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) has just said, smoking in cars where there are children. We also had that important intervention on plain packaging, which we know Israel and Finland have already introduced for e-cigarettes. There is therefore no reason for a delay here.

The industry is using every reason it can consider as to why it needs to continue using advertising. I cross-examined the industry at the Select Committee. To summarise some of the exchange, we were discussing why Blackburn Rovers had those products on the shirts of the heroes of that town. The industry was saying, “It’s really important that we distract people from tobacco products on to our products, because that is our public health measure.” I challenged back and said, “Why don’t you have public health messaging on those shirts instead?” Of course, they argued that that would not work, because they wanted to draw in the next generation of people to use their products. That is what the industry has always been about: it is about generating profit for its shareholders. When it did that with tobacco-based products, ultimately its customers died. That was not the best business model it could induce. With vaping, the industry wants to make sure it has a continuous stream of addicts, and we need to understand that business model to introduce the public health measures needed around harm reduction.

If we look at the figures, we see that a YouGov survey showed that of the 3.6 million adults who are vaping, 2 million are ex-smokers who have now returned to using a nicotine-based product, 1.4 million are current smokers and 200,000 have never smoked and are vaping. Another survey showed that of the people who were vaping, only 47% were also smokers, and 53% were not. We can deduce from that that the reach of these measures and the availability of vaping products means they are being used far beyond the purposes that Public Health England intended and that Javed Khan put in his report to reduce people’s use of tobacco-based products. As a

result, we are seeing more people drawn into an addictive habit, addicted to nicotine and able to use it more regularly and with far more availability. They are therefore taking on higher quantities of this drug, and we are seeing the consequences of that.

The call for taking all the same measures currently in place for cigarettes is therefore vital. ASH and others recommend putting an excise tax of £5 on the product, and we will need to adjust the cost of cigarettes in line with that to ensure that they remain less attractive. We need to ensure that we have investment in the trading standards workforce to address the illicit trade we see in counterfeit products, with the dangers they cause. On branding, it is very clear that plain packaging is required. We must remove the cartoons, the sweet names, the colours and the flavours that are currently being propagated. We must also ensure that promotion is not possible in any sphere. Ultimately, we need to ensure that these products are used only for harm reduction and take that really important whole approach to public health as opposed to looking at one product or another.

We have got to question why young people are taking up the use of nicotine. Yes, there is peer pressure—of course, we understand that, and that is really important. We heard about how children discuss the different flavours and try them out, using the product more and more as a result. Yes, there is the power of advertising—why else would companies advertise but to attract custom? But why is it that young people need a dependency on a drug? We need to get to the heart of that question through a wider public health approach. I am very disappointed that the Government have pulled away from some of their public health strategies, including the health disparities White Paper and bringing forward a more holistic approach to public health. Ultimately, we have got to protect young people from becoming the addicts of the future. That is the role of this Parliament

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Minister.

6.36 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in what has been a largely consensual debate. We have heard from colleagues across the House about the growth in the number of children who are vaping, concerns about physical and mental health impacts, the disruption to education and the drain on staff time in schools.

The Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), spoke of the evidence that the Committee has heard on the impact of vaping on the education of students, including interruptions to exams. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) highlighted the ongoing prevalence of smoking and the need for further work to tackle illegal tobacco sales as well as work to tackle vaping. The right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) spoke about the important role of vapes in smoking cessation. There is no disagreement from the Opposition on that. I am not so grateful to her for taking me back to the revolting smoke-filled environment of the toilets in my secondary school in the 1980s, which is a memory that I had long since sought to banish.

[Helen Hayes]

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) spoke about the need for better enforcement of the existing age verification regulations regarding vapes. The hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) highlighted the sophistication of the packaging, design and presentation of vaping products in retail outlets and how attractive that makes them. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy), who has a long track record of work on this issue, highlighted the extent of the evidence on vaping that is already available to the Government. The hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) highlighted the impact of disposable vapes on the environment and the increase in plastic pollution. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton) spoke from her experience as a former nurse and highlighted the serious problem of vaping equipment being used to distribute more dangerous substances by young people.

The hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), who spoke from her extensive work on this subject, highlighted concerns about the accuracy of data on the safety of vaping. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) spoke about work in his constituency that shows it is possible for retailers to take a different approach to vapes. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) highlighted the Government's failure to act on advertising. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke about the lessons that can be learned from the anti-smoking measures that have been so successful as well as the need to recognise this issue as one of addiction and to locate it in the wider landscape of the addiction economy.

Vaping has shifted from a smoking cessation tool to a recreational activity in its own right, driven by the rapacious desire of tobacco companies—which fund many of the largest vape suppliers—to keep making a profit from the highly addictive substance of nicotine. The growth in the use of vapes by 11 to 15-year-olds has been rapid, increasing by 50% in the past three years. One in five 11 to 15-year-olds in England used vapes in 2021. The figure will be higher now.

The important role of vaping in smoking cessation has led to a widespread perception that it is a harmless activity, rather than a less harmful activity than smoking. Last year, 40 children were admitted to hospital for suspected vaping-related disorders. Young people using e-cigarettes are twice as likely to suffer from a chronic cough than non-users. There are reports that nicotine dependency contributes to cognitive and attention deficit conditions, and worsened mood disorders.

Dr Caroline Johnson: The brain develops gradually over time, and is thought to continue developing in people until they are 25. Some countries have different age limits for different things. Does the hon. Member think that 18 is the right age limit for vaping?

Helen Hayes: The hon. Member speaks from her experience on this issue. We have set out a motion containing some immediate actions that the Government can take, which are well-evidenced, particularly from the approach taken to combat smoking. I agree that the

Government should look urgently at other aspects of the regulatory framework on vaping, some of which we have heard about today.

Vaping products are marketed directly to children, named after sweets such as gummy bears, Skittles and tutti frutti, in brightly coloured packaging decorated with cartoon characters. There is also evidence, including from research undertaken by one of my constituents who I met during evidence week last week, of the burgeoning growth in vaping among 18 to 25-year-olds, almost entirely unrelated to smoking cessation. A new generation of vaping products has been designed to be desirable objects in their own right. If action is not taken to tackle the accessibility of vaping to children, we can only expect vaping among young adults to continue to grow.

Maggie Throup: The hon. Member talks about children and 18 to 25-year-olds. What age does she think is appropriate to ban vaping—16, 18 or 25?

Helen Hayes: The current law prohibits the sale of vapes to under-18-year-olds. We are not proposing a change in the law on the prohibition of sale. I was simply highlighting that young people grow, and those who become addicted to vaping under the age of 18 are much more likely to carry that addiction into young adulthood. That was the point that I was seeking to make. We can expect a pipeline of young people becoming addicted to vaping, which may stay with some of them for the rest of their lives.

This Government have been asleep at the wheel on children and vaping. They had the opportunity to vote for measures to protect children from vaping last year but failed to do so. The measures that the Minister has announced most recently are better late than never, but are simply inadequate to the task. ASH is clear that while educating young people on the risks of vaping through a new resource pack for schools is welcome, the evidence suggests that education alone will not stop children from vaping.

There is substantial evidence on what worked in reducing smoking rates among children. In 1982, when England first started monitoring smoking rates among children, one in five children was a current smoker. Eighteen years later in 2000, the proportion was exactly the same—not because children were not educated about the dangers, but because adolescents are risk takers. Between 2000 and 2021, smoking rates among children fell from 19% to just 3%—not because of better education or enforcement but because the regulatory framework during that time ratcheted up year by year. Under the last Labour Government, all point of sale advertising and display of tobacco was prohibited. A comprehensive anti-smuggling strategy was implemented by HMRC and the UK Border Force, which dramatically reduced sales of illicit tobacco, and cigarettes were put in standardised packaging, with all the brightly coloured glamourised packaging removed.

What is true for the strategy to tackle smoking is true for the challenge of vaping. Without much tougher regulation, we will not succeed in driving down vaping among children and young people. Regulations on packaging, advertising and labelling are essential. Labour is calling on the Government to ban vapes from being branded and advertised to appeal to children, and to work with local councils—

Peter Gibson: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. She has taken a number of interventions from colleagues. The motion refers to children. The shadow Minister commented that there is no proposal, under a Labour Government, to change the age of 18 for purchasing tobacco. By process of elimination, does the word “children” in the motion refer to anyone under the age of 18? Will she clarify that point?

Helen Hayes: I am sure Members across the House do not need much help from me to identify the definition of a child in law as being a person under the age of 18. I will simply move on from there.

What I will say about the motion is that it sets out measures over which I think there can be no disagreement. There can be no disagreement about advertising targeted at children. Measures to deal with packaging that appeals to children could be introduced right now and would have a direct impact on the very alarming numbers of children and young people who are vaping. This has been a very consensual debate, which has acknowledged and set out some of the complexities around the issue, as well as some areas where the Government should be looking at additional regulations and the wider regulatory framework around vaping. I do not think there is disagreement on that either. What we are setting out today is immediate action that is long, long overdue. Frankly, we struggle to see why the Government have been dragging their heels, refusing to act and not accepting these measures.

As I said, Labour is calling on the Government to ban vapes from being branded and advertised to appeal to children, and to work with local councils and the NHS to help ensure that e-cigarettes are used as an aid to stop smoking, rather than as a new form of smoking and addiction. It is inexplicable that the Government are resistant to those entirely proportionate and evidence-based proposals. If they will not act to protect children and young people, the next Labour Government certainly will.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I thank the many right hon. and hon. Members who have made a valuable contribution to this afternoon’s debate. I will respond to the issues they have raised throughout my remarks.

I will start, without dismissing many of the concerns we have heard, by reiterating the importance of vapes in helping smokers move to healthier alternatives than cigarettes. Vapes are helping us to reach our smokefree 2030 target. There are currently about 3.5 million vapers in England, 47% of whom are ex-smokers and 39% of whom are dual users. The best thing, obviously, is for a smoker to stop smoking completely, but as shown in the recently published “Nicotine Vaping in England” report, there is clear evidence that vapes are substantially less harmful to health than smoking. With around 3 million users, vapes have become the most popular quitting aid in England and evidence indicates that they can help smokers to quit, particularly when combined with additional support from local stop smoking services.

That is why, in April this year, the Government announced a range of new measures to meet our smokefree 2030 ambition and reduce youth vaping. We have 1 million smokers who will be encouraged to swap their cigarettes for vapes through a new national “swap to stop” scheme,

the first of its kind in the world. Pregnant women will be offered financial incentives, in the form of vouchers, to help them to stop smoking, alongside behavioural support. We will also consult on introducing mandatory cigarette pack inserts with positive messages and information to help people quit smoking. It is important to point those out, as the hon. Members for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) and for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) did.

Mary Glindon: Will the Minister confirm that the statement made in the 2015 evidence update by Public Health England, that vaping is 95% safer than smoking, remains valid today?

Maria Caulfield: I thank the hon. Lady for that point, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) also raised. The 2015 evidence study was indeed conducted by Public Health England. The most recent evidence we have, from 2022, does not give that precise figure; it does emphasise that vaping is safer than smoking, but does not indicate by how much.

As the debate has made clear, despite vaping’s effectiveness as a tool to quit smoking, illegal under-age vape sales are a growing concern for many parents and teachers across the country, and vaping has increased rapidly among under-18s in the past 18 months. The recent rise in teenage users shows that vapes are being used beyond their intended audience. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) highlighted, there are multiple reasons for that, but whether it is packaging, naming or flavouring, the unintended consequences are clear. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew) pointed out, these consequences are not necessarily easy to deal with, as there may be unintended consequences of doing so—for example, tax increases on vapes might prevent people who want to give up smoking from doing so. There are no easy solutions, so we need to take our time before making further decisions. That is why in April we launched a call for evidence on youth vaping. It closed last month, and officials at the Department have begun to examine the responses. We will set out our response in the autumn.

Other speakers, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) spoke about why it is so important that we consider going further. My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, who speaks with considerable experience, pointed out that this not a party political issue, but a cross-Government matter, with the Department of Health and Social Care dealing with safety, the Department for Education providing advice to children, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport dealing with the role of advertising, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs dealing with the disposable products element. To stop children buying vapes, we also need businesses to comply with existing regulations and to abide by the standards we have set. To help enforcement of the regulations, we have teamed up with enforcement agencies to fund a new illicit vaping unit, which will remove products from shelves and at our borders, and stop the sale of vapes to children.

In May, the Prime Minister announced further measures, including closing a loophole that allows industry to give out free samples; increasing education and supporting

[*Maria Caulfield*]

designated school police liaison officers' work to keep illegal vapes out of schools; and reviewing the rules on issuing on-the-spot fines to shops selling vapes to under-18s, as well as the rules on selling nicotine-free vapes to under-18s, to ensure that the rules keep pace with how vapes are being used. To respond to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell), we are also looking at adding lessons on the health risks of vaping as part of the current RSE curriculum review. Those measures will help headteachers and other school leaders to manage vaping on school premises and inform young people about the risks of vaping, with a view to reducing the number of young people who are currently vaping or might be tempted to try it in the future.

As a number of speakers pointed out, we must of course be wary of the environmental impacts, in particular of single-use disposable vapes. Increasing use of these products is leading to their improper disposal. That is why DEFRA is soon to consult on reforming the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations 2013 to ensure that more of this material is properly recycled. We shall continue to work with the sector and industry to help businesses to understand their responsibilities, both to ensure that their environmental obligations are met, and to ensure that products are not marketed to children, are produced to the highest UK standards, and are compliant with our regulations.

I emphasise that until recently our vaping regulations have been effective in keeping rates of vaping among under-18s low, but of course we acknowledge that there are problems and that we have seen an increase in usage, which is why the consultation is about looking into what more we can do.

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): I welcome the consultation to tackle this problem, but will the Minister confirm that any appropriate measures that the Government take to reduce youth access to vapes will not harm our pragmatic science-led approach to ensuring that adults have access to the full range of alternatives to help them to quit cigarettes for good?

Maria Caulfield: That is the balance we have to create. We do not want unintended consequences whereby we reduce the use of vapes in under-18s but also stop their use among those who are quitting smoking. We know from our evidence that vaping is much safer than smoking. For those communities, very often in deprived areas, where there are higher rates of smoking, we do not want the cost of vapes to be prohibitive and for people not to switch to them instead of smoking.

Our current laws protect children by restricting the sale of vapes to over-18s and limiting nicotine content, and there are regulations on refill bottles, tank sizes, labelling requirements and advertising restrictions. It is important that we remember that regulations are in place, and it is important that they are enforced.

Dr Caroline Johnson: The Minister is talking about evidence that vapes are much safer, but I notice that she has not used the 95% figure that is used by the industry. Clearly, the absence of evidence of harm and evidence of the absence of harm are different things, so will the Minister clarify whether she has evidence that vaping devices are much safer? Or does she just not have evidence yet, because they are so new, that they are not dangerous?

Maria Caulfield: The evidence is there that vapes are considerably safer than smoking, and that was borne out in the 2022 report. The 95% figure was not used then, but I think there is a general consensus that, as the chief medical officer has said, vaping is a much safer alternative to smoking cigarettes.

It is important to remember that regulations are currently in place; it is about enforcing them, which is why the Government have introduced the illicit vape enforcement squad to tackle under-age vape sales, as well as the illicit products that young people can access. We are funding that with £3 million of Government funding.

Alex Cunningham: Will the Minister give a timescale for when the Government will introduce plain packaging for vaping products?

Maria Caulfield: As I just said and as the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) said earlier in the debate, the consultation closed only recently. Officials are going through the evidence and will come forward with the results in the autumn and take them forward.

Rachael Maskell: I raised the issue of addiction; although the Minister has said that vaping products are safer, does she agree that if they are drawing more children into addiction, they are clearly not safe in that field?

Maria Caulfield: We have to consider the evidence and that is not necessarily what the evidence says. NHS England is reviewing the number of admissions and incidents that it feels are caused by vaping, so we are gathering the evidence on that. We need to take an evidence-based approach and currently there is not the evidence that there is necessarily an addiction problem. But we do need to keep building the evidence base.

As we have set out today, we are committed to taking strong and assertive action to tackle youth vaping, and we are willing to go further as part of our evidence-based approach. We have to work with all parties and across Government. This is not just a health issue: it is an issue for the Department for Education, for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in terms of advertising, and for DEFRA in respect of how single-use vapes are disposed of.

We are committed to effectively tackling the issue and driving down youth vaping rates, while making sure that vapes are available to smokers as an effective aid to quitting smoking. We are committed to doing all we can to prevent children from starting vaping and we are actively working on ways that we can go further. We will go further in not only protecting children but driving down smoking rates, so that we make a future where people are not damaged by smoking. To meet our smokefree 2030 ambition, we will do all we can to prevent people from starting smoking in the first place and to give people the support that they need to quit.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House is concerned that children are being inappropriately exposed to e-cigarette promotions and that under-age vaping has increased by 50% in just the last three years; condemns the Government for its failure to act to protect children by voting against the addition of measures to prohibit branding which is

appealing to children on e-cigarette packaging during the passage of the Health and Care Act 2022 and for failing to bring forward the tobacco control plan that it promised by the end of 2021; and therefore calls on the Government to ban vapes from being branded and advertised to appeal to children and to work with local councils and the NHS to help ensure that e-cigarettes are being used as an aid to stop smoking, rather than as a new form of smoking.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION

That the draft Tobacco and Related Products (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 12 June, be approved.—(*Fay Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS COMMITTEE (TEMPORARY STANDING ORDER)

Ordered,

That the European Statutory Instruments Committee Order of 3 February 2020 (as amended on 17 March 2021) be amended as follows:

- (1) In paragraph (1)(a), delete “3(3)(b) or”
- (2) Leave out paragraph (1)(b) and insert:

“(b) any of the following documents laid before the House of Commons in accordance with paragraph 6(3)(b) of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023—

 - (i) a draft of an instrument; and
 - (ii) a memorandum setting out both a statement made by a Minister of the Crown to the effect that in the Minister’s opinion the instrument should be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament (the negative procedure) and the reasons for that opinion, and”
- (3) Leave out paragraph (2)(b) and insert:

“(b) contains any provision of the type specified in paragraph 5(2) of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 in relation to which the Act requires that a draft of the instrument must be laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament (the affirmative procedure);”

- (4) Leave out paragraphs (16)(a) and 16(c) and insert:

“(c) in so far as it relates to documents laid in accordance with paragraph 6(3)(b) of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (and matters arising from the consideration of such documents), at the end of the period after which no more regulations may be made under Sections 11, 12, or 14 of that Act;”—(*Fay Jones.*)

PRESENTATION OF DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That where, under paragraph 17(3)(b) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 or paragraph 6(3)(b) of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023, any document is to be laid before this House, the delivery of a copy of the document to the Votes and Proceedings Office on any day during the existence of a Parliament shall be deemed to be for all purposes the laying of it before the House; and the proviso to Standing Order No. 159 (Presentation of statutory instruments) shall not apply to any document laid in accordance with this Order.—(*Fay Jones.*)

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. During Prime Minister’s questions today, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) asked the Deputy Prime Minister what Emily from Chard, and millions like her, should do when their local dentists surgery closes, leaving them unable to get the care they need. The Deputy Prime Minister advised the people of Chard to vote for the Conservative candidate in the upcoming Somerton and Frome by-election. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] It seems to me that neither the Deputy Prime Minister nor several Members in the Chamber know that Chard is not in that constituency. Chard is in the Yeovil constituency, as the Deputy Prime Minister should have known given that he campaigned 15 miles from Chard last summer, when he was chairman of the Conservative party.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, which I do not think really is a point of order. He says reference was made to Chard being in another constituency, and he has made that clear. If the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) wants a correction to be made, I am sure he will raise a point of order himself. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) has put his view on the record, and we will now move on.

Summerland Fire: 50th Anniversary

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Fay Jones.)

7.2 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is our duty in Parliament not to hide from the past but to learn from it. The Summerland fire has never before been the subject of a debate in this House and, as we approach the 50th anniversary of the fire, it is time that changed.

I take the House back to 2 August 1973, when my constituent's life and the lives of so many others changed forever. Heather Lea was enjoying the start of married life with her husband, Reg, while her parents and little sister, June, were on holiday on the Isle of Man, a place that held special memories for them all. Sadly, those memories are all Heather has left, because on that day her mother, Elizabeth, her father, Richard, and her little sister, June, were among the 50 people who lost their lives in the Summerland fire. As we will hear, the disaster could have been avoided yet, despite this fact, the bereaved families are still fighting for recognition and an apology. Sadly, the chances of there ever being justice appear to have long gone. Heather tells me:

"Fifty years is a long time but the burden has never diminished, and it never will."

The Summerland leisure centre in Douglas on the Isle of Man was state of the art when it opened, two years before that fateful day, and offered a Mediterranean climate in a British seaside resort encompassing a swimming pool, amusement arcades, an underground disco, restaurants and bars. On the evening of 2 August, a fire was started in an unused kiosk on the crazy golf course outside the complex. The kiosk caught fire, collapsing against the exterior wall of Summerland. Due to the materials the architects used in the structure, the fire quickly spread.

The architects of Summerland had opted to use Galbestos in its construction. Galbestos is a plastic-coated metal cladding with limited fire resistance and, in combination with the use of decalin, which burns rapidly, for the internal walls, created the perfect cocktail for a disaster.

The fire broke through the highly combustible surface and burned undetected for a whole 10 minutes before bursting into the ground floor of the leisure building, igniting the Orogas acrylic panels used on the walls and roof. The open-plan design aided the spread of the fire, with the internal spaces acting as chimneys to spread the fire. The terror that those in the building must have felt is unthinkable; survivors described mass panic, with the building appearing to melt before their eyes. One survivor said:

"There were fireballs coming down. It was like raining fire. There was no way to get away from it."

The fire was the deadliest on land since the second world war. I realise as I say these words just how difficult it must be for the loved ones of those who were there to hear them.

Just over a month after the disaster, the lieutenant governor of the Isle of Man appointed a commission to investigate the Summerland fire, under its chair, the hon. Mr Justice Joseph Cantley OBE. The Summerland fire Commission identified several factors in the high

number of deaths, including the construction of the building and the evacuation process, which was described as "delayed, unorganised and difficult" with a number of exits locked. It became clear that the materials used in the construction were known to be a safety risk. Either through the ignorance of professionals who ought to have known better or as a result of downright deception, they were still permitted for use. It is clear that regulations were bent to allow that to happen. The original inquiry in 1973 refers to the drawings submitted as unclear, with no dimensions and minimal details, including a serious error where the composition of the sixth floor was incorrectly labelled.

Significant changes were then made to the design to keep costs down, which the report said did not illicit any "particular discussion or anxiety", despite replacing reinforced concrete walls with Galbestos, which was already known to have limited fire-resistance. The planning submissions relating to Summerland contravened a number of building byelaws and failed to meet the requirement that external walls of any building were to have fire resistance of at least two hours and for ceilings to provide adequate protection against the spread of fire. Permitting the use of both Galbestos and Orogas contravened such byelaws. However, a waiver was agreed, as permitted under the local government building byelaws legislation of 1950.

The inquiry reported that the borough engineer had been orally informed by the architect of the corporation that Orogas was non-combustible. Although the chief fire staff officer made it clear that Orogas was combustible and offered no fire resistance, he raised no objection to the planning committee, which was tasked with reaching a decision on the waiver. Correspondence between the various architects made it clear that the design of the centre could not be delivered in any other way, as it said:

"Unless we are granted"—

an Orogas waiver—

"we shall be in the soup as I cannot suggest an alternative."

Compensatory safety measures should still have been taken, such as more exits and a sprinkler system, but no sprinklers were installed.

Orogas was blamed for the disaster. Although it burned with frightening speed, the main culprit was Galbestos, which was used instead of reinforced concrete, but the fire resistance of that material was never even considered. The failure to consider the properties of materials was not isolated to those in the authorities. The decision to substitute decalin for plasterboard without understanding that it was also combustible, thus giving risk to a combustible void, is described by the inquiry as what

"may well have been the biggest single structural contribution to the disaster of the fire".

Given the time constraints, I am able to provide only a brief overview of the concerns in the processes that resulted in permission being granted to Summerland. However, just from what I have said, it is clear that there were multiple failings across the board, any one of which could have been disastrous on its own; put together, it is sadly all too clear how this tragedy unfolded. Even using the standards of the time, though, it is difficult to see how the judgment of death by misadventure, which the inquiry reached, can stand up to any kind of scrutiny.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. I rise on behalf of my constituent Jackie, who came to tell me what happened to her last year. I had not heard about Summerland before, but she was in Summerland with her mother and her best friend. They both died, but she survived. I know that the hon. Gentleman is going to come on to what we can do now, but, having talked about the fire deficiencies, does he agree that 50 years on we need an apology for those deficiencies? Does he agree that we also need an apology for and recognition of the suffering caused to the survivors? Thirdly, and most importantly, does he agree that we should request that the Isle of Man Government have another review of the death by misadventure verdict?

Justin Madders: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention and for the support he has given to the campaign. As I will go on to say, the Apologise for Summerland campaign has made those requests, which I will talk about in more detail later in my speech.

Taking the point raised by the hon. Gentleman, death by misadventure equates to an accidental death caused by a risk that is taken voluntarily. The 50 people who lost their lives did not voluntarily walk into a building comprised of materials that offered limited or no fire resistance. They were on holiday and they trusted that those involved in building Summerland would not knowingly have used dangerous materials. They believed that the building they were entering was safe. I do not think there is anyone who would think that that is not a reasonable position to take. That is why, among many other reasons, death by misadventure is such an inappropriate verdict to find.

The lack of clarity over the fire protections and precautions at Summerland is a huge concern. No schedule of the means of escape existed for Summerland. Enclosed staircases had no ventilation. Openings were not all fire-resisting or self-closing and contained materials that were not fire-resistant. The physical shortcomings of the construction were clear, but the organisation of emergency procedures was also sorely lacking. Some members of staff who were part of the “fire-fighting party” were not aware of their membership of it, demonstrating the absence of satisfactory training.

There had also been unapproved changes to the fire alarm system, creating a delay before the alarms sounded and the fire station was alerted. The automatic fire alarm from Summerland alerted the fire service at 8.05 pm. However, the public alarms at the leisure centre were still yet to sound. The inquiry concluded that

“no organised system of staff training existed...no member of the staff was given any duty or any instruction whatsoever as to his or her actions in the event of a fire”.

It is plain to see why there was mass panic when the fire started.

The lack of training is sadly borne out in the events following the discovery of the fire. One of the most startling and troubling parts of the account I have read—it is a very troubling read—is when the organist, who was playing at the time the fire was discovered, was asked to continue playing to prevent panic breaking out. Only two minutes after he was given that instruction, he reported that the fire was clearly visible at the back of the amusement arcade. Evacuation began only at

that point, when the flames had become visible to the visitors, causing mass panic and undoubtedly making matters worse.

Around 20 minutes prior to that, staff had been unsuccessful in dealing with the fire or in notifying the fire service via the automatic alarm system. The inquiry concluded that the building, and by inference the lives of those lost, could have been saved if the fire service had been called shortly after it was found that the firefighting efforts of the staff had failed.

While there was some guidance and a document had been drawn up in 1971 in regard to evacuation, knowledge among managers and staff was limited. There was no evacuation procedure in place and drills had not been carried out. Those in management were unclear as to who was responsible, but failed to make enquiries to clarify that. Staff were not properly trained and there was no one exerting overall control. Had there been, the necessary alerts could have been made and evacuation processes could have been carried out. Instead, some exit doors remained locked, despite the fire service complaining to management about this previously; the escalator remained on, preventing a safe means of escape; and the generators failed to provide the emergency lighting that was needed.

The inquiry concluded that there were failures by the Douglas Corporation and the local government board in terms of providing and scrutinising plans and a lack of inter-communication. The choice of architects was also criticised, with the inquiry exposing their lack of scientific understanding and a failure to focus on fire safety. The inquiry said there was a lack of design management and a continual failure to examine the development of plans. That is important, because that could have highlighted the flaws, resulting in errors being identified.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I congratulate him on bringing forward the debate. As it happens, I was in the Isle of Man last week, as a guest of the President of Tynwald and the Speaker of the House of Keys. One of the official guests was a lady called Ruth McQuillan-Wilson, who has written a number of books about the Summerland fire; she herself was a survivor. I want to put on record a tribute to Ruth, who described the events of the evening to me and the events that have subsequently followed, as the hon. Gentleman has outlined.

Justin Madders: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I echo the support that he has given to the many campaigners who have fought for more than 50 years to bring this matter to light.

The structure, once it was built, did not have proper technical inspections, which would have been yet another stage at which issues could have been raised. The chief fire officer did not consider issues of firefighting on receiving the original plans and was then not consulted on significant changes to those plans. The certification for the building, and indeed the processes in general, are said not to have been stringent or rigorous, and there was an absence of fire safety and evacuation plans.

It was a litany of failings. Despite that, the inquiry concluded that “there were no villains”. I think we can see, beyond doubt, that that conclusion was wrong. There were clear failures in the plans by the authorities,

[Justin Madders]

the fire service and the management of Summerland. The inquiry made 34 recommendations, demonstrating how many flaws there were, yet there remains to this day a lack of accountability.

Three young boys appeared before the juvenile court for damage to a kiosk, but apart from that nobody took responsibility or blame—whatever you want to call it—for the failings. I do not know whether it was because there were so many people and organisations that could have been found to be at fault. Perhaps it was the grossly inappropriate finding of misadventure that led to that lack of accountability. Perhaps, given the times that we were in then, accountability was just a little bit harder to find. Whatever it was, once the inquiry finished that was more or less it. Perhaps this failure to hold the authorities or individuals to account is why recognition of the disaster is so limited.

My constituent describes the memorial near to the Summerland site as “insignificant and insulting”, drawing comparisons with a stone bought from a garden centre. She has recently discovered that it is only her family who are mentioned in the remembrance book at the crematorium on the island, and that is only because they paid for their entry in it. I find that disappointing. In fact, I find it appalling and disrespectful. The families lost so much on that day, and recognition of such should not be reliant on payment. That is something that we expect and hope will change.

The original memorial was replaced with something more fitting in 2013, on the 40th anniversary, but we must question why, for the preceding 40 years, those in charge felt that the loss of 50 people did not warrant a proper memorial that would offer a space for reflection and solace. Heather tells me that even at the memorial event in 2013, the dignitaries who attended failed to approach any of the family members present, which she describes as incredibly hurtful for those visiting the place where their loved ones had perished.

After speaking to Heather and Reg and learning more about the disaster, I approached the Isle of Man Government to ask them whether they would commit to a full inquiry, similar in structure to the Hillsborough inquiry—we have a blueprint that could be followed. I accept that, perhaps, given the length of time that has passed it might be a little bit unrealistic to expect that, but I still expected more than the response I received, which simply directed me to the inquiry of 1973. However, the impending anniversary, and perhaps the publicity surrounding this debate, has perhaps focused minds a little more, as I have this morning received from the Chief Minister an email indicating that there will be a national service of remembrance on 30 July, and that he will be holding a private reception prior to that where he has indicated his wish to hear directly from the survivors and victims’ families. That certainly feels as if he has heard the concerns about what happened at the 40th anniversary. He has also indicated that he will be holding an event to thank those from the emergency services who responded to the fire.

The Chief Minister has also said that he will be making a formal statement about the disaster to the Isle of Man’s Parliament next week. Although we do not know what he will say in that statement, I want to use this debate to encourage the Minister to formally write

on behalf of His Majesty’s Government to indicate their support for the requests made by the Apologise for Summerland campaign, which, as we have heard, are a public apology from the Isle of Man Government for the

“disregard for basic fire safety in favour of saving money and speedy construction;

a public apology for

“the pain and suffering for the last 50 years”;

and a public admission that the death by misadventure verdict was inappropriate.

I appreciate that this Parliament cannot tell another Parliament what to do, but I hope that the Minister will be able, diplomatically and sincerely, to make those requests and convey the feelings expressed by Members in the House tonight. It is clear that the conclusions of the inquiry fell short of the standards that we would expect, and fell short of providing genuine accountability. There is a need for an apology from the Isle of Man Government for their role in the disaster.

I hope that the Minister will be able to convey on our behalf that, as we are approaching the 50th anniversary of the disaster, an apology is long overdue. The knowledge of the bereaved families that the loss of their loved ones could have been avoided is still incredibly painful, but the fact that their deaths are still legally categorised as misadventure only exacerbates that pain. I pay tribute to the bereaved families, who have never given up their fight for justice; to the Apologise for Summerland campaign for all that it has done to give a voice to the families; and to Grenfell United, which is standing side by side with the Summerland families. Grenfell United has said:

“The similarities between Summerland and Grenfell are chilling”.

We will never know whether true accountability for Summerland might have prevented the Grenfell tragedy from happening. Sadly, there are far too many what ifs, which must torment all involved. I will finish with a few words from Heather, which echo that point. She says:

“We don’t feel that it’s ever been recognised that 50 people lost their lives. I’ve lost 50 years of having my sister... It was a fire that should never have happened. I feel so sorry for the people of Grenfell. If the reports had been acted upon from the Summerland fire, Grenfell probably wouldn’t have happened. You can’t brush something like that under the carpet anymore.”

I hope that following today’s debate we can build on the cross-party support that we have had to date, and that through the advocacy of the UK Government, families will receive the recognition, apology and accountability that they deserve. I appreciate that the passage of time makes true accountability difficult, but I am certain that they deserve better than they have had so far.

7.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on securing this important debate. Much of what I will put on record he has clearly laid out, with commendable passion for the constituents he represents.

The fire broke out on the evening of Thursday 2 August 1973. It was, as the hon. Gentleman said, a horrific and tragic incident. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I say that our thoughts are with the friends and families of those who lost their lives, and with the survivors who still retain vivid memories of the tragedy

and their loss, as both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) have clearly said.

I reiterate and put on record that the leisure centre, which opened in 1971, was deemed to be the most innovative indoor entertainment centre in the world. It was described as a “climate-controlled megastructure” and was the first of its kind in the world. However, as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston said, the building was clad in Orogas, a highly combustible and transparent acrylic sheeting, and Galbestos, a corrosion-resistant steel sheeting. Those materials were not compliant with the Isle of Man’s fire regulations at the time, which stated that

“external walls of any building shall be non-combustible throughout and have fire resistance of two hours”.

It was later established that the fire was caused by an accidentally discarded lit match or cigarette at a kiosk on the outdoor terrace at 7.40 pm. The initial blaze was detected by staff, who tried to extinguish it. Unfortunately, they had not realised that the fire had already broken through the wall of the Summerland leisure centre, spreading across the wall’s interior, which ignited the flammable acrylic sheeting covering the building. As the hon. Gentleman said, the attempt to evacuate the building began only when visible flames appeared through a vent. By that time, the fire was already out of control, and many people were trapped inside, unable to escape. Forty-eight people lost their lives that night, with two more later dying of their injuries, and at least 80 others were injured. The Summerland fire is the worst disaster in Manx history, and remains the third-worst loss of life from fire on land in the British Isles since the second world war.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the Isle of Man is a self-governing jurisdiction that is not part of the UK. It was therefore the Isle of Man’s then lieutenant governor, His Excellency Sir Peter Stallard, and not a Minister of the UK Government, who established a public inquiry known as the Summerland fire commission on 3 September 1973. He appointed a three-man commission to inquire into the circumstances of, and leading up to, the fire at the Summerland leisure centre, and to make recommendations.

The commission included Mr Justice Cantley, a presiding English judge and a former judge of appeal on the Isle of Man; Mr Philip Wilson-Dickson, second in command of the UK Home Office fire inspectorate; and Professor Denis Harper, the head of the department of building at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. Sir Peter appointed Mr Justice Cantley to be chairman of the commission and Mr Carter, of the Government Office, Isle of Man, to be its secretary. The commission’s work was finished in February 1974 and its 40,000-word report, published in May of that year, found that, as I have already noted, neither Orogas nor Galbestos complied with the Isle of Man’s fire regulations. The report deemed the tragedy to be the result of a series of human errors.

I know that constituents of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston lost loved ones that night, and constituents of other hon. Members will also be remembering friends and family affected by that wholly avoidable disaster. It is right that we remember the Summerland fire in the House today as we approach the 50th anniversary. It is also important that those in positions of authority in relation to such matters do all they can to ensure that fires on the scale of Summerland do not happen again. The Summerland fire commission urged the immediate revision of theatre regulations and drastically changed the whole approach to fire safety on the Isle of Man.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Summerland fire, it is important that we remember those affected by the tragedy. The Deputy Chief Minister of the Isle of Man, Jane Poole-Wilson, has announced plans for a series of commemorations to mark the anniversary. These will include a national service of remembrance, a service at the Kaye memorial garden, and a formal presentation to the emergency and health services. The Isle of Man’s Chief Minister, Alfred Cannan, will also be making a statement on the subject of the 50th anniversary to the Tynwald, the Isle of Man’s Parliament, next Tuesday, 18 July.

The commemorations will be an opportunity for the island community to come together to pay its respects to those who were affected by the disaster and to remember the victims. I am sure there will be people living in the UK, perhaps constituents of the hon. Gentleman or indeed of other hon. Members present in the Chamber, who will wish to join the commemorations. I should add that, in addition to those events, Culture Vannin and Manx National Heritage will be hosting online exhibitions and oral history projects as part of the commemorations, which will provide a valuable record of the disaster and help to ensure greater awareness of the Summerland tragedy, not least among younger generations.

The Summerland fire was a horrific tragedy that claimed the lives of 50 people and injured many more. As we approach the 50th anniversary of that awful night, it is important that we remember the victims and the lessons that can be learned from this tragedy. We must never forget the victims of the fire, and we must ensure, as far as we can, that something like that never happens again.

I happen to be going to the Isle of Man tomorrow as part of my regular engagement with the Crown dependencies. I will ensure that this debate and the comments of hon. Members are conveyed to the Chief Minister, who I am sure will take very seriously the comments made in the Chamber tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

7.27 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Division

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER, CONFERENCE AND CHRISTMAS)

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 20 July 2023, do adjourn until Monday 4 September 2023; at its rising on Tuesday 19 September 2023, do adjourn until Monday 16 October 2023; and, at its rising on Tuesday 19 December 2023, do adjourn until Monday 8 January 2024.

The House divided: Ayes 395, Noes 5.

Division No. 297]

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barker, Paula
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bhatti, Saqib (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Blackman, Bob
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity

Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Butler, Rob
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Champion, Sarah
 Chishty, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coyle, Neil
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Creasy, Stella
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dixon, Samantha
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Double, Steve
 Doughty, Stephen
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David

Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Efford, Clive
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Elmore, Chris
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glen, rh John
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Carolyn
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinds, rh Damian

Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jarvis, Dan
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason

McKinnell, Catherine
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Norris, Alex
 O'Brien, Neil
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Osamor, Kate
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John

Percy, Andrew
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Powell, Lucy
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Randall, Tom
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees, Christina
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richardson, Angela
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rodda, Matt
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex

Solloway, Amanda
 Spellar, rh John
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephens, Chris
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeting, Wes
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sultana, Zarah
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Throup, Maggie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Timpson, Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trickett, Jon
 Trott, Laura

Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Twist, Liz
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Webb, Suzanne
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Winter, Beth
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Davey, rh Ed
 Foord, Richard
 Foy, Mary Kelly

Hollobone, Mr Philip
 McCartney, Karl

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 12 July 2023

[JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

UK-Mongolian Relations

9.40 am

James Gray (in the Chair): May I announce a rather unusual change to normal procedure? I intend to take part in the debate, but I am also a member of the Speaker's Panel of Chairmen, and it has been agreed by all parties that in the absence of the regular Chairman, I shall chair the debate until Sir Roger Gale comes to relieve me, which should be in a few minutes. I hope that that is acceptable to the House.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK-Mongolian relations.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray, during this important debate on Anglo-Mongolian relations. It was a tremendous privilege for me to be appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Mongolia some two and a half years ago. I come from an exports background: before becoming a Member of Parliament, I spent my formative career after university in exports, and I fundamentally believe that the future prosperity of our nation is predicated on our ability to have the same strength in exports that we have in our indigenous economy. The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world, but not the fifth largest exporter. We have a target of £1 trillion of exports by 2030, and the role that the trade envoys play in promoting British exports is very important.

In January, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of our bilateral diplomatic relations with Mongolia, and 60 is an important number for Mongolians, so they held a large reception at the Dorchester hotel. I was pleased to speak at the event, together with the Deputy Prime Minister of Mongolia, to highlight the fact that the UK was the first European country formally to recognise Mongolia as an independent sovereign nation.

During my visits to Mongolia, the country's geopolitical significance has become ingrained in my thinking. There are tremendous opportunities for bilateral co-operation, which I shall set out in the debate, but before outlining our goals and aspirations in Mongolia and the far east, let me describe the wasted decades of our obsession with the European Union.

Post Suez, we lost confidence as a nation. Suez was such a jolt for us—this is a subject I have studied extensively—that our mindset as a nation changed. We went through a period of economic and political malaise. Certainly, I believe, we went through a period of significant retrenchment, and we pulled away from many of our commercial and military interests in the far east. It was the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew—as you will remember, Mr Gray—who remonstrated with us for pulling away from our bases there. We tended to focus purely on our own continent and the European Economic Community. At that time, civil servants and

others peddled the narrative, “The empire has gone. We are too small to navigate the world stage, and we need the crutch of the EEC.”

There then ensued decades of political, economic and constitutional enslavement to the process of the supranational state. We watched the constant EU summits and the constant debates in which people tried to thrash into one policy the views and aspirations of 28 countries. We left the EU and, despite all the bullying from Brussels, we have kept our course to freedom and independence.

This Government have achieved two extraordinarily important goals during their tenure of office: entry into the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, the world's largest and fastest-growing trading bloc; and membership of AUKUS, the new naval agreement between Britain, Australia and America. If protected, those two extraordinary achievements will have a profound impact not only on the British economy, but on world security and peace. The CPTPP is the world's largest trading bloc and contains some of the fastest-growing countries in the world, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam—in fact, the whole of the far east. Those countries are growing extraordinarily. The United Kingdom is the only European country that has been invited to join, and my understanding is that we will be signing the treaties to enter this month or next month—

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Sunday.

Daniel Kawczynski: Sunday, in fact. The CPTPP involves no interference in our domestic affairs or our judicial processes, and no membership fees of £200 million a week—just pure trading. It is so exciting for the British people to enter a market that is growing at a phenomenal rate.

The second achievement, AUKUS—the new naval agreement with America and Australia—gives us the opportunity with our allies to re-enter the Indian and Pacific oceans in a meaningful way, for the first time in my lifetime. The British media's obsession with scandal and petty domestic issues is of great regret to me, because it does not focus on the extraordinary achievements of the CPTPP and AUKUS. When we go to the Dog and Duck in our constituencies, how many people come up to us and talk to us about AUKUS or the CPTPP? Nobody comes to talk to me about those things in my surgery or the local pub, and yet I feel passionately about them because they signal a huge pivot for Britain away from this obsession with our inconsequential continent, which is shrinking every day as a percentage of global population and GDP, and instead towards the far east, where the real growth is, not just for ourselves but for future generations of British businesspeople and entrepreneurs.

We now have a Mongolian intern in my office on a three-month secondment: Lomax Amarsaikhan, who studied at the University of Bristol. He is writing a report about British entry into the CPTPP and whether Mongolia ought to emulate us. I would like to ask you, Mr Gray, and others participating in the debate who have experience of how Britain signed membership of that very important organisation, and the logistics and wherewithal of our experience of entering the CPTPP, to contact Lomax. He will spend the next two months

[Daniel Kawczynski]

with me, writing that report in Mongolian and English. It will be presented to the Mongolian Parliament, so that we can share with the Mongolians our experience of entering this huge new bloc and encourage them to consider whether it would be suitable for them to follow us.

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

There are 195 countries in the world, yet only one has no coastline, with the Russians to the north and the Chinese to the south: Mongolia. What an extraordinary situation. More than any other countries in the world, Russia and China use brutality to oppress and subjugate their neighbours. They bully their neighbours and steal territory without remorse. That is quite extraordinary, given their status as permanent members of the UN Security Council. One would think that the five countries with the extraordinary privilege of being permanent members of the UN Security Council would be at the forefront of trying to uphold an international rules-based order predicated on the rule of law, democracy, human rights and all the other attributes of modern democratic societies and modern international relations that we feel so strongly about. Yet the Russians and the Chinese are doing the exact opposite: contravening the rules and regulations of the UN, the European Court of Justice and the International Court of Justice and trying to manipulate and threaten their neighbours.

Mongolia is a beacon of hope and democracy in that region. So many countries in that region—Russia, China, Burma—are oppressing their people. The reason I am so excited about Mongolia and feel so strongly about that nation is that despite its being subjugated by the Soviet Union as a satellite state and spending decades under a brutal, oppressive communist regime, whenever I go there I see the thirst and determination to grasp and nourish democracy and try to create a genuine democratic society in which there is rule of law and freedom of the press, and in which people can criticise politicians and get rid of them at elections.

We must support countries such as Mongolia, despite all the provocations from some neighbours and their past difficulties. We must support them economically and from a security perspective. For me, China is the biggest threat. I started to ask questions about China's conduct in the South China sea seven years ago, of the then Foreign Secretary, Mr Hammond. I asked what the British Government's attitude was to the Chinese seizure of hundreds of atolls in the South China sea—stealing them from Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and others and militarising the whole of the South China sea, a waterway through which 60% of the world's trade passes.

The response from the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office, which is indelibly imprinted on my mind, was that they do not take a view on the dispute of uninhabited atolls in the South China sea. I very much regret that answer, because I feel that the militarisation of the South China sea and our turning a blind eye to the Chinese stealing hundreds of atolls, pouring concrete on them and militarising the area are the thin end of the wedge. They give the communists succour and the ability to know that they can continue to push the boundaries in their expansionist policies in the region.

It is not just the South China sea. We all know the situation with Taiwan and the difficulties that the Taiwanese Government are experiencing. We know that the Chinese have trashed the agreement over Hong Kong that they signed with Margaret Thatcher in December 1984. We had a debate in the House the other day about the subjugation of democracy rights activists in Hong Kong. We know the allegations regarding the brutal suppression of the Uyghurs and, of course, the situation in Tibet.

Two gentlemen, Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne, made the biggest mistake in their determination to cosy up to the Chinese, because of the dollar, the huge power of the Chinese and their ability to invest money and provide big markets. We are rightly critical of other countries because of their human rights abuses, but we have turned a blind eye to the Chinese and their conduct. The mistake made by Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne was profound. I hope that this Government and subsequent Governments will be more adroit and more courageous in ensuring that we start to divest ourselves of our extraordinary overdependence on imports from China.

When I asked the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how we were going to become less dependent on China, she said one word: CPTPP. By entering the CPTPP, we enter a market in which 99% of goods will be traded tariff-free. What is it that we currently import from the Chinese that we cannot import from the Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Singaporeans, Malaysians and others? That is the message that I want to get across to the Minister. I want us to use our entry into the CPTPP to encourage countries such as Mongolia to join us—fellow democracies like Mongolia and people who believe in the things that we do—in the new trading bloc. I want us to use our position to try to restrict Chinese entry into the CPTPP unless China starts to behave in a different way towards its indigenous population and its neighbours.

When I visited Mongolia, I was taken to the Gobi desert to inspect the Rio Tinto copper mine. Rio Tinto, based up the road in St James's Square, is a major Anglo-Australian mining company. I spent the afternoon inspecting the world's third largest copper mine in the world, the Oyu Tolgoi Rio Tinto mine in the Gobi desert. I was taken 1.5 km underground and spent the afternoon inspecting the honeycomb labyrinth of tunnels that make up the world's third largest copper mine. It has an investment of over \$15 billion and a massive impact on the Mongolian economy.

One thing I was particularly pleased to see was that 97% of all the mineworkers were Mongolian and that the mine had won major international environmental awards for the way that it mined and looked after the area in which it was mining. That has a hugely important economic benefit for Mongolia. I am proud and privileged to have played a small part in the negotiations between the Mongolian Government and Rio Tinto in reassessing and modernising the agreement so that it is now a win-win for both sides.

Let us not forget that only 7% of Mongolia has been explored. We already see vast opportunities in the mining sector, yet only 7% of this jurisdiction has been explored. The Mongolians are mining the copper and it is going straight across the border to the Chinese in its lowest-value form. It goes in huge railway compartments across the

border to China, which, as the Minister knows, is so thirsty for all minerals. It seems to devour all these things so quickly.

I say publicly to the Minister that the way to compete against the Chinese in Mongolia is by demonstrating to our Mongolian friends and partners that we want a genuine win-win partnership rather than the exploitative type of approach that they have experienced in the past. I am talking to UK Export Finance about the possibility of trying to bring British technology and expertise in copper smelting and refining. What better way to send a signal to the Mongolians that we are interested in increasing their economy, bringing added value to their output and giving them the power of having that processing industry in their own country, not just for Rio Tinto but for many other mining jurisdictions across the country?

We have the opportunity to say to the Mongolians, “We are going to work with you. We are going to bring in this technology and, potentially, we are going to finance it.” I have £2 billion burning a hole in my pocket at the moment. I do not often say that, but that is what I have generously been given by the Minister’s Department and UK Export Finance for cheap soft credit loans to facilitate British entities operating in and exporting to Mongolia. The solution need only have a minimum of 20% British content, but it is a huge opportunity for us. I pay tribute to UK Export Finance, in front of the Minister.

My interactions with Mr Tim Reid, the chief executive of UK Export Finance, have been tremendous. He and his team are very agile and adept at meeting and trying to work productively and effectively with us trade envoys to provide additional resource and opportunities for us to promote British exports with those additional soft loans and credit, which are extremely important. Can I please ask the Minister to take an interest as I progress with others in trying to bring British expertise into the Mongolian copper refinery industry? I will keep her up to date on my meetings with the chief executive of UK Export Finance, to let her know the progress on what I consider to be probably the single most important economic solution on which we can work together with the Mongolians to bring value-added processing to their copper industry.

The second issue is the capital, Ulaanbaatar. It is a beautiful city, which I have had the honour of visiting on four separate occasions. Mongolia is a huge jurisdiction with massive opportunities but a tiny population of only 3 million. I think it is going to be the next United Arab Emirates, Kuwait or Qatar within our children’s lifetime, not from oil but from minerals. Such is the wealth of the country, and so small is its population, that there is a genuine opportunity to create huge prosperity.

I look forward to the Minister’s visit to Ulaanbaatar, which she has promised to make at some stage; as she will see, it is one of the most congested cities in the world. Unfortunately, the Mongolians have one of the highest cancer rates in the world as a result of the extraordinary pollution in that city. I have been warned not to go in January and February, not only because it is about minus 40°C, but because of the huge amount of pollution in the city as a result of the congestion.

The Mongolians have asked us to look at working with them to build a ring road around Ulaanbaatar—not quite an M25, but a ring road. That is their most important strategic project, because they can see that

their capital city is slowly being choked off. It is expanding extremely quickly and cannot cope with the level of congestion, which is causing them a significant problem. I say to those watching on television who have expertise in the construction, architecture or design of such arteries, or in any aspect of construction, please contact my office. As we continue to engage with the Mongolians, we would be very interested in providing them with the maximum number of British solutions possible, and that project could be financed by UK Export Finance.

I move on to critical minerals. I have already spoken extensively of my concerns about China’s brutal communist regime. As one of the Tory MPs sanctioned by Russia, I have already been banned from entering that country. The Chinese have already threatened to ban me from China if I continue to express anti-Chinese sentiments in the House. Perhaps this will tip me over the edge. I would be proud to join other Tory MPs who have been sanctioned in that way by the Chinese and the Russians.

China controls 80% of the world’s rare earth minerals. I want people to remember that for a second—it is extraordinary. We went to war in ’56 in Suez because of our misunderstanding that Nasser would restrict the flow of oil. We were so profoundly concerned about our industry collapsing as a result of the restriction of that vital commodity that we went to war. It backfired on us spectacularly, but we are entering a period when critical minerals will have even more significance for our economy than oil did in the 1950s—I am absolutely convinced of that. When flying back to Heathrow across the North sea, we see the thousands of wind turbines that we are building. We have more offshore wind than any other country in Europe, yet not a single one of those turbines can operate without a magnet. That magnet is made from rare earth minerals.

How can we keep our wind turbines, cars and most of the economy and industry going in future without rare earth minerals? They will be hugely important and I am pleased that, as the Minister will know, we have a dedicated Minister for rare earth mineral strategy: the Minister for Industry and Economic Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani). I am also talking to her about this issue.

When one country controls 80% of the world’s rare earth minerals, particularly a country as nefarious as China, we and future Governments need to start thinking about a strategy on becoming less dependent on the Chinese. At some stage in our lifetimes, they will threaten us by restricting access to rare earth minerals. I do not know when that will come—maybe over difficulties concerning Taiwan or difficulties with our freedom of navigation exercises in the South China sea; the only thing keeping that sea open is the implementation of those exercises by Britain and America. I do not know when the conflict will come, but I do know that, given the nature of the communist regime in China, it will attempt to restrict access to those vital minerals at some stage in the future.

We need to find alternatives, such as the mine in Mongolia that can potentially produce 10% of the world’s rare earth minerals. I have met representatives of the British company that owns the mine—they are based here in London—and I am very encouraged about the opportunities to exploit it, in collaboration with our Mongolian friends and allies, so that we can be less dependent on the Chinese.

[Daniel Kawczynski]

The issue is not just about mining the rare earth minerals. We are bringing British processing industry to Mongolia to turn those minerals into magnets so that they can be air-freighted directly to Britain. That is the future. Relying on imports through China is no longer acceptable, whether from Kazakhstan or Mongolia. The next stage is for us to bring British processing industry to Mongolia. Again, that is a win-win situation for our Mongolian allies and ourselves, when it comes to turning the rare earth minerals into magnets. It is commercially viable, as the Minister will know, to air-freight magnets from a foreign jurisdiction directly to the United Kingdom, which would give us supplies of that vital commodity in the eventuality of difficulties or tension with the communist People's Republic of China.

Before I finish, let me add a word about JCB, an extremely important British company based in Staffordshire, the county next to mine. No organisation or company better exemplifies the opportunities for British products in a country such as Mongolia. I visited the JCB dealership in Ulaanbaatar and met Gerry, the Mongolian gentleman who runs it with his wife and family. In the past eight years, the dealership has gone from 0% to over 25% market share for these sorts of machines in the mining industry in Mongolia.

I asked Gerry, "How do you do it? How do you compete against the machines from China? The Chinese just have a border to cross; we have to build these things in Staffordshire and get them across the world." Gerry said it was about two things: the quality of the British goods and the after-sales service. We test these machines to destruction. The durability of the British products and the after-sales service are what differentiates British products from Chinese ones. That is what has given us such a competitive advantage over our Chinese competitors.

I was so impressed by Gerry and his team that on my last visit I invited the Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister to visit the dealership; I hope that the Minister visits it when she goes to Ulaanbaatar. Everything there is British-made—from the factory to the workshops and the areas where the goods are on display. There is even a golf driving range for customers that was built and designed by British architects and manufacturers. If we could bottle Gerry's enthusiasm for selling British products, we would make a fortune. He is so proud of his partnership with the United Kingdom.

We need more political focus on Mongolia, and I have outlined to the Minister why Mongolia is so important. Earlier this year, I was in Kazakhstan as an election observer in Astana. While I was there, the Foreign Secretary visited Astana and signed some important agreements with this other extremely important democratic country. Kazakhstan is very similar to Mongolia: it has extraordinarily high levels of mineral production and is a post-Soviet satellite state, but it is a country that is inching its way towards democracy and the rule of law. I was impressed by what I saw as an election observer in Astana—genuine freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Mongolia and Kazakhstan, side by side, are the exciting democratic flowers that we need to water, nurture and bring into our rules-based order of democracy and freedom. They are two fascinating countries—

Mongolia and Kazakhstan, side by side—and there is no greater contrast than that between them and Russia and China.

The other day, I briefed the Foreign Secretary about the need for him to visit Ulaanbaatar, and he promised that he would consider that. I hope that the Minister will take that away with her. She can see my motivation and genuine excitement about the country. Will she engage with the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister about the possibility of a state visit for the President of Mongolia, or the possibility of our own Prime Minister inviting the Mongolian Prime Minister to the United Kingdom?

Ulaanbaatar was flooded recently, and yesterday my Mongolian intern showed me a video of the destruction and devastation of Ulaanbaatar—some of the worst floods that the city has had for many years. I hope that when the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office looks at international aid, it looks at countries such as Mongolia. I want a team of British hydrologists and flooding experts at least to visit Mongolia and engage with the Mayor of Ulaanbaatar so that we can see how we can support our Mongolian friends and allies in dealing with what they perceive to be one of their biggest threats: their inability to control the flooding.

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

As the Minister will know from my Prime Minister's questions, I always refer to the fact that my town, Shrewsbury, is flooded every year. We are working on a holistic solution to managing the River Severn and I chair the caucus of 42 MPs through whose constituencies the river flows. She will know the nightmare and devastation caused by a community's flooding every year. That affects our friends in Ulaanbaatar, and I hope the Minister will take note.

When the Minister visits Mongolia, I will make sure she meets the only female governor in Mongolia's 21 provinces, Bolormaa Enkhbat. She was chief of staff to the Mongolian Prime Minister and is now the country's first and only female governor. She invited me to her province of Khovd, near Kazakhstan, which meant a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Ulaanbaatar. I was extremely impressed as she showed me around many opportunities for investment in her province. I very much hope the Minister will meet her.

Another thing I saw in the province, and which I hope the Minister will be able to see, is a hydroelectric power station built by the Chinese 10 years before my visit. I had never seen anything like it. I spent an afternoon walking around it and was blown away by the poor finish and poor quality. It is almost designed to fail—or disintegrate—at some stage. It would not pass muster here in the United Kingdom in a month of Sundays. If we are to compete against the Chinese on infrastructure projects such as that one, it is important we bring that expertise.

I want to pay tribute to Philip Malone, the outgoing British ambassador, who has had a career in the Foreign Office lasting more than 40 years. His first posting was in 1983 in Argentina, so we can imagine what a difficult slot that was. We did not have relations after the Falklands war and relations were done through the Swiss embassy. The professionalism and conduct of British ambassadors when one is overseas always gives one a tremendous

pride in one's own country. Our ambassadors—the men and women privileged to do that role—are the best, and Philip Malone has been exceptional. I also welcome the incoming British ambassador, Ms Fiona Blyth, who is the first female British ambassador to Mongolia. I had the honour of meeting her recently, and I wish her every success in future.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for Mongolia, who does a great deal in promoting bilateral relations. I also pay tribute to the former Labour MP John Grogan, who tells me he is busy campaigning in Selby today and who I think will stand in Keighley at the next general election. He does a tremendous job as chairman of the Mongolian British chamber of commerce. I also want to thank Kevin Ringham, the civil servant who runs the Prime Minister's trade envoy programme.

Mrs Harris, you have been the third Chair today, so I cannot say it has been a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship only, as you have been there only part of the time. I hope the Minister realises how being trade envoy has given me a huge enthusiasm for Mongolia. It is a very important democratic partner for the United Kingdom and I look forward to her work and that of the Government in continuing to nurture relations with Ulaanbaatar.

10.19 am

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I thank the Chairman of Ways and Means for kindly allowing me to take part in this debate after having opened it in the Chair. It is an unusual thing to have done, and I am glad to have set a new record.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski), whose speech was wide-ranging, geopolitical and extremely interesting. He is a true master in the development of our relationship with Mongolia, and I thank him for the work that he does as our trade envoy. The way he has made a real presence in Mongolia, and a real presence for Mongolia here in London, is superb. The work he has done is outstanding. His speech today will go down in the history of UK-Mongolia relations as being extremely important in laying out the significance of our trade relations with Mongolia.

I hope the House will forgive me if I am a little more parochial than my hon. Friend and deal with the country of Mongolia rather than elsewhere in world—that is more my level. I want to let the House know that I am a bit of a fraud; the reason for my interest in Mongolia is that throughout my entire childhood my father used to threaten to send me there if I was naughty. I had no idea where Mongolia was; I thought it was somewhere extremely remote, very strange and unusual, and pretty awful. When I came to Parliament 27 years ago and had the opportunity to visit Mongolia, I thought I had better find out what it really was like. I am delighted to say that my late father could not have been more wrong in his description of what an awful place it was; I am delighted to have had my relations with Mongolia develop ever since.

Mongolia is a very interesting place. It is a huge country—something like 10 times the size of the United Kingdom. There are only 3 million people, more than half of whom live in Ulaanbaatar. There are a very

small number of people, largely herdsmen, elsewhere across the country. They preserve their magnificent traditions, which stretch back to earliest times, encompassing Genghis Khan and the great Mongol empire in the 13th century—the largest empire the world has ever known.

Incidentally, the Mongol empire of Genghis Khan was largely dependent on the fact that he invented stirrups. For that reason, he was able to have his warriors charging with swords and bows and arrows and fighting from horseback, while the enemy could not. The same applied when the Saxons lost in 1066; they rode down to Hastings and then got off their horses—they did not have stirrups. Genghis Khan did have stirrups, and that accounts for the greatest empire the world has ever known.

It is important that Mongolia maintains those traditions. When one goes there, one stays in a ger—it is not a yurt, which is a Russian word. One must ride a Mongolian horse, as I have done many times. Although given my height, I can actually run along the ground as I ride because the horse is so small. It is quite an experience. One must buy some Mongolian traditional dress—people wear it to this day, particularly in the countryside, but also in Ulaanbaatar—and take part in all the magnificent and important cultural events there. It is a great way to remember the past.

The Mongol derby happens next week. My friend Philip Atkins is taking part in the 1,000-mile race across the steppes on Mongolian horses—what a magnificent way to commemorate the great postal runs across Mongolia. My best wishes to Philip for what lies ahead. I would not do it for all the tea in China—or in Mongolia, come to that—so well done to him for doing it. Those kinds of tradition, and the history and culture of Mongolia, are of huge significance.

One of the main reasons I am in love with Mongolia is that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham mentioned—it is a little beacon of democracy. The little Parliament, the State Great Khural, operates in a region that is not at all friendly towards democracy. Mongolia is surrounded on one side by Russia, and on the other by China—both are hostile, and the Mongolians dislike both equally. The country is reliant on both to some degree, but is certainly not friendly to either, and for good reason.

There, in the middle of nowhere, Mongolia maintains proper democracy, based on our system in Westminster, which is to be encouraged. It is therefore important that we find ways of assisting Mongolia in the constitutional changes coming up—it is just about to change the way the Parliament is elected. We should assist it in every possible way to make those changes and to continue to develop that important democratic beacon in the middle of an anti-democratic desert.

With that in mind, I am very glad that I have often visited Mongolia with the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The IPU do great work in encouraging democracy in Mongolia. It is disappointing that we were not able to be there this year, which is the 60th anniversary of our recognition of Mongolia, but I hope we will be there soon none the less. The all-party parliamentary group for Mongolia might organise a trip, if we can find some funding to do that, and I hope the IPU might reconsider the decision not to visit this year and find time to do so shortly. It is terribly important that we here, with 1,000 years

[James Gray]

of democracy in this building, make use of our knowledge and experience in countries such as Mongolia, which are desperately trying to hang on to democracy.

I join my hon. Friend in welcoming the new ambassador, Fiona Blyth, to her place in Mongolia. She is a great woman—I have met her many times—and she will do a superb job in representing Britain's interests. I also thank the outgoing ambassador, Philip Malone, who did the job with great distinction indeed. We do wonderful work in supporting democracy in Mongolia and we must make sure that we continue to do so.

In passing, may I refer to the all-party parliamentary group, which is very active in this place? We see a lot of Mongolians coming through Parliament, and I am most grateful to a member of my office staff, Oscar Harrison, who runs the group for me. He does a first-class job. This is an important APPG. This Parliament has far too many APPGs, and I only run those that are very active and do things. The Mongolia APPG does a great deal, and I am most grateful for it.

In my 25 years of visiting Mongolia, I am delighted to say that I have seen huge changes. I remember going there shortly after the Soviets had withdrawn. Ulaanbaatar, or UB, was a pretty rundown little Soviet-type place with one major hotel, which had one thing on the menu, namely mutton. If guests did not like mutton, they did not get anything to eat.

All those years ago, Mongolia was a pretty rundown ex-Soviet country, but the changes I have seen since then are extraordinary. UB has doubled in size—with some environmental consequences, as my hon. Friend mentioned—and some worthwhile modern technologies and industries are developing there, particularly with regard to the Oyu Tolgoi mine and other mining and mineral interests.

I have also been glad to see the cashmere industry develop over the years. Some 30 years ago, the Gobi Cashmere factory in Mongolia was extremely basic and grey cardigans were all that was available. Today, the cashmere industry is fairly modern and widely advertised, and the industry exports to the UK, which I am glad about, although more could be done. I think I am right in saying that the company is still owned by the state, and if it were privatised it might become even better. None the less, some of those new industries—

Daniel Kawczynski: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

James Gray: I do not have much time. My hon. Friend spoke for 45 minutes—[*Interruption.*] Let us not bother with that for now. I hope we will see Gobi developing further in the years to come.

We in this country have an enormous amount to contribute to Mongolia. I have already mentioned democracy and the free-market economy, both of which we can lead on for Mongolia and the rest of the world, and we can contribute a huge amount with regard to commerce and industry, as my hon. Friend has described. I am glad that there is, for example, a big relationship between the London stock exchange and the Mongolian stock exchange, and the Mongolian stock exchange can learn an awful lot from us.

In a variety of other economic and trade aspects, we are developing our relationship with Mongolia, and we can also do a lot with regard to education and science. English is now the second language of Mongolia, which I am glad about, and we can do a huge amount to promote industry, science and education there. I am pleased that there is also a defence relationship with Mongolia, and 6,000 Mongolian troops served in Afghanistan alongside us. Those troops made a useful contribution to the defence of the world.

Mongolia is no longer the outer extremity of the world, which is how my father described it to me all those years ago. It has a great distance to go before it becomes a fully integrated, fully modern and fully democratic nation state. We all want that to happen, but the changes I have seen in 25 years of going to Mongolia are quite extraordinary and very worth while.

I send the Mongolians every good wish, and I hope Mongolia keeps on its steady track of movement towards democracy and a free-market economy. I hope Mongolia maintains its fine old traditions as it does that. We must remember the country's culture, language and education. If it continues in such a way, people in 60 years will be able to look back from the 120th anniversary of our recognition of the country and be proud of the contribution Britain has made to Mongolia.

10.29 am

Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairwomanship, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) for stepping in as temporary Chair to ensure that the debate could occur. I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on securing this important debate. I understand that he is a passionate advocate for UK-Mongolian relations, as was evidenced by the time he took to speak.

This debate comes as Mongolia marks 60 years of diplomatic relations with the UK. Trade between the UK and Mongolia has dropped by as much as 58% over the past three years, from a total value of more than £0.5 billion in 2020. The Mongolian economy continues to rapidly grow, presenting new opportunities in sectors such as energy, education and agriculture for companies across these four nations. I would welcome further details from the Minister on the UK Government's plans to increase UK exports, and specifically Scottish goods, to the Mongolian market.

In terms of energy, trade with Mongolia presents Scotland with a unique opportunity. Scotland, of course, has vast expertise in the renewable energy sector, in areas such as wind and hydropower, and it is important that closer links are developed between Scottish companies and their Mongolian counterparts to build on that expertise. In order to better promote Scottish businesses and harness that expertise, it is important that Scottish Government officials are invited to future UK-Mongolian trade meetings. Will the Minister commit to that today?

When last asked in February 2022, as I understand, the UK Government stated that the Department for International Trade had a team of four focused on promoting UK exports to Mongolia and reducing barriers to trade. Given the drop in exports and the increased budget allocated to promotion of UK trade, I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed whether that number will rise.

The UK Government should look to work alongside the Scottish Government to host trade exhibitions to promote Scottish goods and industry. That is especially important given that whisky and other food and drink products do not feature on Mongolia's list of top 10 imported goods from the UK. It would provide an opportunity to promote a vital sector of the Scottish economy and culture, but it must be done in a way that ensures local sensitivities around alcohol consumption are respected.

We must ensure that environmental policies remain at the centre of any bilateral discussions. Given the centrality of the mining of critical minerals to the Mongolian economy and the role that UK companies play in harnessing these resources, it is vital that we ensure the correct environmental protections are implemented. It is particularly concerning to hear that some environmental groups have faced issues. Amnesty International has expressed its concerns over the erosion of civil liberties, designed to prevent opposition to mining operations across Mongolia.

In May 2022, the Mongolian Government introduced a Bill to amend the criminal code, creating prison sentences for obstructing mining and other development projects. The draft law would restrict legitimate non-governmental organisation activity, prohibit legitimate activities and limit NGO funding. I wish to put on record the SNP's support for freedom of association and assembly. NGOs play a vital part in our battle against climate change. Although the Mongolian Government have signalled that they are amending the Bill, we wish to see UK-Mongolian diplomatic engagement reiterate our opposition to the provisions in that legislation, and any subsequent legislation, if it is deemed necessary, must not water down the right to protest.

Indigenous herding communities are bearing the brunt of the impact of increased mining activities. Coal and other mining operations in the Gobi region of Mongolia have destroyed grasslands, contaminated groundwater and depleted other water resources. Those actions are displacing indigenous communities, around 28% of whom—about 600,000 people—have moved from rural communities to the capital. Those who have been displaced face issues including not receiving compensation from the mining operations, and experience the health problems associated with living in temporary accommodation. Those left living in rural communities face health issues caused by the mining activities, on top of the economic damage caused by the destruction of land that was previously used for grazing.

Like all countries across the globe, Mongolia is impacted by changes to the climate, but because more than 30% of the country is desert, it is particularly badly hit by rising temperatures. That will likely force more climate refugees to move to the capital from rural areas, so it is in all our interest to tackle climate change effectively. I hope Mongolia will continue to build on the success of COP26 in Glasgow, and will push to meet its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At the conference, the President of Mongolia committed to the planting of 1 billion trees by 2030 as part of a bid to reforest areas of Mongolia, tackle desertification and create a carbon sink. I hope the UK Government will assist Mongolia in its efforts to tackle climate change, and I hope the Minister will refer to that in her remarks.

This debate has highlighted the need for improved links with Mongolia, which would of course present opportunities for Scottish businesses to expand into new markets and capitalise on Scottish expertise in green energy. That is incredibly exciting. I hope the four nations of the UK will continue to develop closer bonds with the nation of Mongolia.

10.36 am

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for securing this debate. The chair of the all-party group for Mongolia, the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), spoke fondly of his regard for Mongolia, and the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Ms Qaisar) rightly called for responsible business practices around mining, particularly in relation to traditional nomadic populations.

It is particularly apt that this debate is taking place during the Naadam holiday. I want to pay my respects, and I wish all those celebrating a very happy Naadam. Although our relationship with Mongolia is not our oldest diplomatic relationship, it is one of the warmest. It was a privilege to represent the Labour party at the reception earlier this year on the anniversary of 60 years of diplomatic relations between our two countries, and it is a pleasure to stand here on behalf of the Labour party to celebrate that landmark.

I was also pleased to attend a Mongolian British chamber of commerce event led by John Grogan, the former Member of Parliament for Keighley, who is a great friend of the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham and a great champion of Mongolia in the UK. In recent months, I have met His Majesty's ambassador to Mongolia, Fiona Blyth, and Minister-Counsellor of Mongolia, Bolormaa Batsaikhan. They have both given me a good insight into the relationship and the opportunities between our two countries. I am confident that, through them and the committed team of diplomats in London and Mongolia, the relationship will continue to grow.

I want to put on the record Labour's enduring thanks for Mongolia's contribution to the NATO military mission in Afghanistan. There is no greater symbol of abiding friendship and co-operation than sending young men and women into danger to support allies, and Mongolia stepped up to the plate. The international contribution to the people of Afghanistan was truly global, and the 6,000 Mongolian soldiers proudly served shoulder to shoulder with our servicemen and women in Kabul.

I also applaud the growing trading relationship between Mongolia and the UK. There is ample room for it to continue to grow—admittedly, from a low bar—and I know there will be many opportunities for British business to visit the country and develop interests there. In particular, there seems to be an opportunity to share best practice on traffic management to reduce poor air quality, which was mentioned earlier.

I will end on that note, as this has been a particularly consensus-based debate, but I ask the Minister what steps the Government are taking to support the relationship. What measures are being considered to increase exports and cultural exposure here in the UK and in Mongolia? We should not forget that English is our best export, so I hope the Minister is promoting the British Council and the many wonderful things that it can offer in

[Catherine West]

Mongolia. Our relationship is warm, and the opportunities are very real and can mutually benefit both countries. Here's to 60 more years of a growing relationship.

10.39 am

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I thank the team for making sure the debate could go ahead, despite the challenges at the start.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for securing the debate and for his passionate commitment, as the trade envoy to Mongolia, to highlighting the wider trade opportunities opening up now that the UK has left the EU and we once again have control of our trade policy. I encourage him to bring his local businesses together, at the Dog and Duck or some other watering hole in his constituency, to share with them some of the CPTPP opportunities that are coming up and to think about how we can ensure that resources as part of the export strategy now held in the Department for Business and Trade can support them as they look to new and exciting markets.

To the point made by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), and wider questions about opportunities with Mongolia, a key strand of the export strategy is to help our local small and medium-sized enterprises to find the new opportunities for export. I am also grateful for the contributions of other hon. Members and the warmth of their comments. I hope to cover some of the questions that were raised.

As has been mentioned, 2023 is a significant point for UK-Mongolian relations, marking 60 years of diplomatic relations between our two countries. The UK is rightly proud of its status as the first western nation to establish diplomatic ties with Mongolia, which opened the door for like-minded nations to do the same. Mongolia continues to be an important strategic partner for the UK. As we look towards the Indo-Pacific through the lens of the integrated review, Mongolia continues to be at the heart of some of the opportunities there.

Mongolia's story is as fascinating as it is complex. A democratic island in a sea of autocracy, it has overcome many of its geographical constraints to emerge a modern, strong success story. As it continues its evolution from Soviet satellite state to Asian market economy, we share a deep commitment to democratic values and upholding the international order. As the shadow Minister highlighted, Mongolia has demonstrated that with real tangible commitments through its armed forces commitments.

Mongolia operates a third neighbour policy, reaching out to partners such as the UK, diversifying its relationships and reducing its dependence on Russian energy and trade with China. UK trade with Mongolia is good for us both. Mongolia continues to build resilience to Russian and Chinese pressure while we open up new markets for British businesses. For example, the south Gobi desert is home to the world's fourth largest copper mine, operated by Rio Tinto, which has invested around \$12 billion in the Mongolian economy. The UK Government have offered consistent support as the

project has developed, and UK businesses have benefited from a variety of opportunities in the extensive supply chain.

Since we signed a memorandum of understanding with Mongolia to co-operate in the extractive sector, its abundant mineral resources have attracted global attention, with France, the US and South Korea also signing agreements to help explore Mongolia's critical minerals industry. That is in part driven by Mongolia's desire to move away from a reliance on selling to China, while western countries seek to reduce China's dominance in the wider critical minerals supply chains. The availability of UK export finance for projects in Mongolia is another sign of our commitment to our trading relationship and to strengthening the economic ties between our countries.

Elsewhere in the country—to the shadow Minister's point—education, one of the UK's greatest exports, is proving to be a vital tool to combat Russian disinformation. Mongolia recently made English its official second language, displacing Russian, and is looking for investment to increase English teaching coverage across the country. We have a strong educational relationship, thanks in large part to our Chevening programme. Eleven Mongolian scholars came to the UK to study this year, and I am delighted to announce that we will welcome 17 next year, reflecting both the high calibre of the students, which is of course always important, and the productive nature of our relationship with Mongolia's Ministry of Education.

It is in that spirit of hope for the future that, later this year, the UK will sign a memorandum of partnership and co-operation with Mongolia to mark our diplomatic anniversary and to deepen our relationship across a range of areas, including critical and strategic minerals, trade and investment, education and the environment. The partnership shows the Foreign Secretary's ambition to boost UK influence in middle-ground countries, and to support an international system that reflects our values, especially in Asia.

To grow our influence over the long term, we need to provide greater support for Mongolia in the field of education. That is a key part of our offer and an avenue through which to combat Russian influence, but more than that, it is an investment of faith in this wonderful country that has chosen English as its language of business.

We will work with Mongolia to develop its infrastructure and help it to diversify its energy supply. Discussions are ongoing over the construction of a copper smelter, which my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham raised, and which would help Mongolia to move up the value chain and reduce dependence on China for copper processing. We will work with Mongolia to ensure that any copper processing operation makes economic sense and is done—importantly for us—in the most sustainable way possible.

Mongolia is also a key ally in stopping the circumvention of Russian sanctions, which is essential to denying Russia the funding for its war in Ukraine. We can help by continuing to provide support for Mongolia in its fight against corruption and assisting it in its efforts to strengthen its democracy and build state capacity. At 33 years old, Mongolia is a young democracy, but strengthening democracies anywhere in the world automatically strengthens our own.

It is important for the UK to continue to engage with Mongolia, pinched as it is between Russia and China, and we will seek to co-operate in whatever way we can. Our relationship with Mongolia is already in very good standing, and we recognise the opportunities that that strong partnership presents, as well as the consequences for the international system should we engage insufficiently.

Mongolia is a western-leaning democracy that is walking a diplomatic tightrope—maintaining healthy relations with the neighbours on which it depends, while deepening ties with the west and across the Indo-Pacific. Its move to make English an official language is a sign of its willingness to engage internationally, and when the UK engages in return, we help to contest the Russian periphery and isolate Russia on the global stage. The memorandum of partnership and co-operation will be the start of increased engagement with Mongolia and a road map to a strong and productive future relationship.

10.46 am

Daniel Kawczynski: I will not say much, because I have already spoken for a long time. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Mongolia, referred to Gobi Cashmere. Of course, cashmere is one of the most important exports for Mongolia. I know that Gobi Cashmere is setting up operations in Europe from the United Kingdom and will want to export more cashmere. Being 6 feet 9 inches, the tallest Member of Parliament and officially a giant, it is not possible for me to buy suits easily, but I am modelling my Gobi Cashmere suit, which I purchased in Mongolia. Once you try Mongolian cashmere, you never go back. For anybody who is in the market for a new suit, this is what you can get—Gobi Cashmere from Mongolia.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK-Mongolian relations.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

Abandoned Vehicles: Public Highways

10.56 am

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered abandoned vehicles on public highways.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the important issue of abandoned vehicles on public highways, which unfortunately are quite common in Keighley. As I see it, it is generally an issue of antisocial behaviour. It has been raised with me at surgeries by many constituents across Keighley, Ilkley and the wider area, and I have visited streets in Keighley to see the vehicles for myself.

We are talking about vehicles that are generally unroadworthy, untaxed, uninsured and without number plates, and that have been left on the public highway for weeks, months or sometimes years. Sometimes they have engines or other parts—predominantly bumpers—missing, having been used as a roadside shop for spare parts.

The issue causes huge frustration to my constituents who have to live on the streets in question and drive past the abandoned vehicles daily, and it impacts the wider feel of Keighley. There are several streets in the centre of town on which vehicles have been abandoned, and many residents have to drive past them to get to work or school.

I want to use this opportunity to get to the crux of how we sort the issue out and get abandoned vehicles that have been left on the public highway for months, if not years, moved. It seems to me that we have the legislation in place but that it is not being utilised fully by Bradford Council. I will come on to that.

The point has been made to me that, in some cases, vehicles have been abandoned in places where they are causing a nuisance to neighbouring residential or business properties. On Brewery Street, just off Dalton Lane in Keighley, one business, which is in its third generation, is being impacted by abandoned vehicles that have been left in situ for many a year. These nuisance vehicles are causing that business problems with its day-to-day functions, because delivery lorries are unable to get in. Quite rightly, that business wants to grow and expand, but it cannot get delivery lorries in and out, because these abandoned vehicles have been left on the public highway.

One thing that always gets thrown back to me is that these vehicles are on the public highway but not an adopted public highway, and we need to understand the difference. The legislation states that “public highway” relates to that which is a private road, but the public have the ability to drive down it, whereas with a public adopted highway the council—Bradford Council—has full control over it.

Many residents have rightly contacted me because they are fed up with these abandoned vehicles and the slow progress that Labour-run Bradford Council is making in removing them. This situation is not just ringfenced to Keighley; it is a wider Bradford district problem. *The Yorkshire Post* reported on the issue in November 2022, when there was a concerted effort by the council in Bradford city and 90 abandoned vehicles were identified on one street alone. When the notice provisions, which I will come to, were served, various owners suddenly came out of the woodwork to claim

[*Robbie Moore*]

their vehicle, despite these vehicles having been abandoned for years, with flat tyres and parts missing—I dare say that the engine probably was not even in some of them. That reduced the number of abandoned vehicles from 90 to only three, on which the council was then able to take action. We absolutely need to get to grips with this issue.

Hotspots in Keighley include Ferncliffe Drive. I met the residents there over a year ago, because they are deeply concerned. It is a private road but a public highway, and there are sometimes up to 15 abandoned vehicles, many of which have no number plates and parts missing. They are uninsured and unable even to get to an MOT centre, let alone pass the MOT. The council should be able to take action and move these vehicles on. Residents on Ferncliffe Drive are rightly getting incredibly frustrated, and the issue of Ferncliffe Drive was specifically raised at the Utley safer streets group meeting, which I was kindly invited to—I have spoken there twice, and I get invited on a semi-regular basis to provide an update on the actions I am taking. I confirmed to that meeting, which was full of concerned residents, that I would bring the issue to Parliament, and I am pleased the Minister is in her place to listen.

Another hotspot is just off Dalton Lane, which is in a residential/industrial part of town. Again, many streets off Dalton Lane are used simply to abandon vehicles. That is unfair on businesses, as I mentioned, but also on the residents of those streets. There is also South Street, which is a very busy street that is used to enter Keighley from the Worth Valley side of the constituency. Every time I have gone up to Cross Roads, Haworth and the wider Worth Valley area, I have counted three abandoned vehicles in close proximity. They have not moved since I have been the MP, which is coming up to four years. Action has to be sorted out. There is still a problem, despite me, as the MP, having raised it with Bradford Council, along with many residents and businesses.

I want to get to the crux of the powers a local authority has available to it, because Labour-run Bradford Council does not seem to be taking the actions available to it under legislation. The powers sit under section 3 of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978, which gives councils—and national parks, although that does not apply to the circumstances I am describing—the ability to “remove and dispose” of abandoned vehicles. The Act also contains provisions to give local authorities the powers to issue fixed penalty notices to offenders, if the vehicles are not moved on.

The question is, what is an abandoned vehicle? An abandoned vehicle can quite easily be identified, yet the pushback I get from Labour-run Bradford Council is, “Oh, it’s very difficult to decide whether a vehicle is classified as abandoned.” Well, all it needs to do is to go on the Government website, which clearly outlines the provisions for an abandoned vehicle.

First, an abandoned vehicle is one that has no listed keeper on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency database and is untaxed—information that can quickly be found by visiting the DVLA website and typing in the number plate.

Secondly, an abandoned vehicle is one that has been stationary for a significant period. I suppose the question could be, what is “significant”? Well, if a vehicle has

been abandoned for over a year and has not moved, and it has flat tyres, has quite clearly not passed its MOT, and is untaxed or uninsured, that would imply a significant period of time, and it would be reasonable for the council to take action. Again, I put on record my frustration that Bradford Council is not taking the issue seriously.

Thirdly, a vehicle could be abandoned if it is significantly damaged, run down or unroadworthy or has flat tyres, for example. If the Minister would kindly come to my constituency so that I could take her to all these hotspots, she would see for herself that these vehicles should clearly be classified as abandoned. Fourthly, a vehicle can be classed as abandoned if it is burned out, and it would be perfectly reasonable for a burned-out vehicle to be moved on.

Finally, the authority may decide that a vehicle is abandoned if its number plate is missing. That is all that is needed to classify a vehicle as abandoned; it might be properly roadworthy, but if its number plate is missing, it can be classified as abandoned. I have multiple vehicles in my constituency that would be classified as abandoned, that are causing a nuisance to residents and businesses and that need to be moved on.

What duty is placed on a local authority? What powers does it have to move abandoned vehicles on? The legislation is quite clear, stating that a local authority has the ability to move on an abandoned vehicle from a public street; from a private road that is classified as a highway; from an adopted road that is classified as a highway; or from land in the open air, including private land. However, I will focus predominantly on roads, because I am getting most correspondence about abandoned vehicles on roads.

If an abandoned vehicle is on private land, the local authority is duty-bound to serve a 15-day notice period, but that notice period does not apply if the vehicle is on a public highway, so why is Labour-run Bradford Council not getting on with it? It does not need to conform to the 15-day notice period, as that does not apply if a vehicle is abandoned on a road that is classified as a highway, whether that is private or a publicly adopted road. Under the legislation, the local authority is quite rightly protected and cannot be held liable for any damage resulting in its removal of a vehicle from the public highway.

The local authority has two options, and it is incredibly frustrating that Labour-run Bradford Council is not using the opportunity available to it under the 1978 legislation. First, it could apply a penalty. Local authorities can penalise people who abandon vehicles or parts of vehicles—yes, parts of vehicles have been abandoned in Keighley, much to the frustration of local businesses and residents—on the public highway or private land; it can issue a fixed penalty notice or prosecute them. I completely understand the challenge associated with not knowing who owns the vehicle or who owns the private land, but I am focusing on vehicles abandoned on roads. If the owner of the vehicle is not known, it is right that the local authority serves a seven-day notice on it, and if nobody claims that vehicle within that time, the local authority is duty-bound to take action under the 1978 legislation. But Labour-run Bradford Council is not even serving the notice, let alone taking action when nobody comes forward to claim the vehicle after the seven-day period.

There are provisions in legislation that give my local authority the ability to move these vehicles on, but it is not doing so. It can dispose of an abandoned vehicle immediately if either of the following points applies: the vehicle is only fit to be destroyed—that is, it is classified as abandoned—or it has no number plate or tax disc. Those are easily identifiable measurables, but my local authority seems unequipped to find out whether a vehicle is properly classified as abandoned. If I were a civil enforcement officer, I would happily go round my constituency, identify all the abandoned vehicles and get them moved on, because my residents are sick to the back teeth of having to put up with such vehicles being left year on year.

If a vehicle is abandoned and we do not know who the owner is, the local authority has the ability to give that vehicle seven days' notice. If nobody identifies the vehicle within seven days, the local authority has the ability to move it on. If the owner ever comes back to claim the vehicle, the local authority can charge them for the cost of removal and storage, which is perfectly reasonable.

That brings me to the Removal, Storage and Disposal of Vehicles (Prescribed Sums and Charges) Regulations 2008. The regulations set out how much a local authority can reclaim from the vehicle owner should they ever come to light and identify their vehicle, but I think the Minister could review them, because the removal cost is too low. For example, if a vehicle exceeds 3.5 tonnes but is less than 7.5 tonnes, and it is not upside down or on its side but in a stable position, the maximum amount the local authority can reclaim from the owner is only £200, which will not reimburse it for the cost associated with removing and disposing of that vehicle. To give the local authority its due, that is probably one reason why it is not taking much action, because the removal cost it can recoup from the owner, should they ever come and identify themselves, is only £200 in those circumstances. I do not think that is enough, and the Government could review the regulations.

The crux of this issue is that my residents and businesses, and indeed anybody who comes to visit Keighley—it is one of the most awesome constituencies to come and have a look round—have to see fly-tipping taking place. Vehicles are being left on the street, causing a nuisance to anybody who visits Keighley, resides there or wants to operate their business.

The second issue I want to address is how we challenge businesses that use the highway to park abandoned vehicles for spare parts, often for several years. I think the legislation could be toughened up, and there needs to be more focus on the ability of local authorities to take action against these businesses. Garage businesses may be parking abandoned vehicles on the highway to get spare parts, and it is unfair that they do so.

My understanding is that we have legislation in place that enables a local authority to take legal action if a business is using repair cars on the road or using the road to sell cars, but that has to be toughened up, because the only action that can be taken is issuing a fixed penalty notice, which amounts to only £100. That is nowhere near tough enough to deter businesses from using the public highway to store abandoned vehicles.

The legislation also gives local authorities the ability to take a business to court on behalf of a complainant, which relies on a resident making a complaint against

the business. My residents do not have the time or the willpower to deal with that. The local authority should be empowered to take action against that business to stop it using the highway to, effectively, carry out its business by using the highway as a storage camp for its abandoned vehicles. If the matter goes to court, a magistrate can fine the business only up to £2,500. Again, that is nowhere near a strong enough deterrent.

To sum up, I am pleased that Mr Speaker has granted me time to bring to the House the important issue of abandoned vehicles on the public highway. It is an issue in Keighley and my wider constituency. Local authorities are empowered to remove abandoned vehicles, and it is incredibly frustrating that Labour-run Bradford Council does not use the powers afforded to it sufficiently. When it comes to businesses using the public highway to, effectively, store abandoned vehicles, we could go further and use tougher legislative provisions. I urge the Minister to look at the statutory instrument I referred to, so that we can bring forward much tougher fines, which will act as a deterrent.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Trudy Harrison): I think this is the first time I have served under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. It is a privilege to do so today and to follow my fantastic colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore). He is clearly a champion for his constituents and is in tune with what they need to thrive and what they need for their livelihoods to prosper.

In preparing to speak in this debate, I researched some statistics and was shocked to learn that between 2020 and 2022, Bradford had the highest number of abandoned car reports outside London. That is being played out today in the way my hon. Friend cites a number of areas.

Robbie Moore: The Minister notes that Bradford Council is one of the country's worst-offending areas outside London with the highest number of abandoned vehicles. Does she agree that the legislative powers are there for a council to utilise? If so, does she share my frustration that Labour-run Bradford Council is not using the powers awarded to it to deal with this issue, which is blighting my constituents?

Trudy Harrison: My hon. Friend makes a powerful and effective point. I am not the Minister responsible for waste at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—that is the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow)—but I will recommend that she meets him and that perhaps we should consider writing to Bradford Council on that point.

As part of our environmental improvement plan, which we proudly published on 31 January, there is a clear imperative to leave the environment in a better state. That is fundamentally about halting nature's decline by 2030 and increasing its abundance thereafter, but making sure that we have clean water, clean air and good quality soils and that we tackle waste and resources is a fundamental part of that 262-page document.

We need all councils, including Bradford Council, to play their part, and we need residents to do the same. Clearly, the issue of deliveries not being able to get to a

[Trudy Harrison]

business and Brewery Street being clogged up means that business will not be able to prosper. My hon. Friend mentioned the Utley safer streets group and some particular hotspots for abandoned vehicles, namely Ferncliffe Drive, Dalton Lane and South Street; I urge Bradford Council to make those areas a priority, as that is clearly where the focus needs to be.

My hon. Friend is right that the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act has been in place since 1978, when I was coming out of nappies, and that it allows local authorities to take action. It is a criminal offence to unlawfully abandon any vehicle

“in the open air, or on any other land forming part of a highway”.

As he said, doing so is punishable by a fine of up to £2,500 and/or three months in prison. As an alternative to prosecution, councils have the power to issue a fixed penalty of £200 to the vehicle owner. There is a clear legislative vehicle—primary legislation that has been in place for some 45 years—that councils can use.

Recent research by Scrap Car Comparison, based on freedom of information requests to city councils across the country, found the shocking statistic that Bradford had the highest number of abandoned car reports between 2020 and 2022. There are clearly specific issues in Keighley as well. Too many abandoned vehicles are being left to rust, without their owners giving due consideration to their correct disposal. That is clearly a problem for the environment and for local residents, as my hon. Friend set out.

It is not acceptable to run a spares and repairs business on the side of a road. Some of these vehicles are just an eyesore, but the nuisance goes beyond the blocking of roads, parking spaces and property access. The hazardous fluids and chemicals that they contain pose a serious risk to the environment and can contaminate the surrounding land, water and air. That directly contravenes what we all want to achieve in our environmental improvement plan and what society demands of us.

Let me outline some of the measures that are already in place. We are committed to encouraging local solutions for local problems, which is why I commend the Utley safer streets group. I am pleased that my hon. Friend is meeting with those can-do people, who are passionate about improving their community; I will always commend and encourage them.

Before removing a vehicle, authorities must first decide whether a vehicle is abandoned. My hon. Friend made the point about a vehicle not having a keeper, not being taxed and not having moved for a period of time; I agree with him that 12 months is a significant period. If a vehicle has flat tyres or is missing essential parts and panels, and if it has been left for a significant period of time without a number plate, it is blindingly obvious that that vehicle is not roadworthy.

I also confirm that the legislation and measures to which my hon. Friend referred are indeed correct. Local authorities can dispose of an abandoned vehicle themselves. They can do so immediately if it is fit to be destroyed, has no number plate or is untaxed, as my hon. Friend said. Otherwise, they can do so if the owner cannot be found or fails to comply with a notice to collect the vehicle. To help councils to tackle the situation, we have

given them powers to penalise people who abandon vehicles or parts of vehicles on public highways. People can be issued with a penalty notice of £200 or—for more serious issues—prosecuted, which can lead to a maximum fine of £2,500 or three months in prison.

I will take up my hon. Friend's ask to review whether the legislation could be improved to increase enforcement, because without the appropriate powers and action we will not achieve our environmental improvement plan's 38 legal targets and our moral ambitions. I will certainly undertake to identify further measures that this Government could take in relation to that.

I also want to touch on producer responsibility, because we are still producing new cars and we need to think about the future and how we dispose of the products we make responsibly. That is part of the work that DEFRA is doing. In addition to supporting local action to tackle the abandonment of vehicles, we are tackling the environmental impact of end-of-life vehicles. The end-of-life vehicles producer responsibility scheme—that is a mouthful—has led to an improvement in the treatment of scrap vehicles and to increased recycling and recovery rates. In 2018, of the 1.6 million tonnes of scrapped end-of-life vehicles, 93% were recycled and recovered—an impressive increase from 87% in 2011.

Under the producer responsibility scheme, vehicle manufacturers and importers have a responsibility to establish collection systems into which end-of-life vehicles can be delivered free of charge. Local authorities are also able to deliver end-of-life vehicles into those collection schemes.

Scrap metal has significant value, too. Because 75% of most vehicles is metal, they have value even at end of life. People are incentivised to sell vehicles for scrap, rather than abandoning them on the road, but it is not acceptable for the vehicle to slowly degrade and for spares and repairs to be sold over a period of months and years, clogging up roads and causing a blight to communities and a danger to our environment.

Local authorities have powers to tackle nuisance parking where a business leaves two or more cars for sale, or repair cars, on the road within 500 metres of each other. They can either issue a £100 fixed penalty notice or take the business to court on behalf of the complainant, which can lead to the business being handed a fine of up to £2,500. Furthermore, if a member of the public has concerns that a business is selling a vehicle on the road, they can ask the local authority to make a control order. If a control order is issued, the offender must stop selling vehicles on the road and can be fined £1,000.

In response to my hon. Friend's excellent points, the evidence is clear that this is a significant issue in the Bradford Council area. I have demonstrated how the Government are supporting councils to tackle this local issue, and outlined how the producer responsibility scheme helps individuals to properly dispose of their end-of-life vehicles. External research shows that the number of abandoned car reports in Bradford peaked in 2021. I hope that the good people of Bradford, particularly in my hon. Friend's constituency, continue to enjoy dwindling reports of abandoned vehicles. Legislation is in place, but we will look at whether it can be strengthened. There is a clear environmental imperative to take action so that vehicles

are not left at the side of roads for months and years at a time. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this issue to the House's attention.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered abandoned vehicles on public highways.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Metropolitan Police: Stephen Lawrence Murder Investigation

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Metropolitan Police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I will start, as is fitting, by paying tribute to Doreen and Neville Lawrence. Time after time, they have faced setback after setback, yet they continue to campaign with dignity for justice for their murdered son. It is a dignity that puts the shabby performance of the Met to shame. We can only imagine the anger and frustration that they feel, having to endure another revelation that yet again exposes the failings of the investigation into Stephen's murder and raises the suspicion that corruption hampered it from the start.

Stephen Lawrence was murdered in Eltham on 22 April 1993. One of my first acts on becoming a Member of Parliament was to table a question in the House calling for a public inquiry into the investigation into Stephen's murder. I pay tribute to my former colleague John Austin, who supported me in doing so. Despite the stench of corruption that surrounded the case from the start, the Macpherson inquiry did not conclude that corruption hampered the investigation. Despite many revelations and investigations along the way, corruption has always been denied.

We are here today thanks to the excellent detective work of two people: the BBC reporter Daniel De Simone, who uncovered evidence that was originally ignored and spoke to key witnesses exposing the failings of the original inquiry, and Chief Inspector Clive Driscoll, whose outstanding work along with his team secured the convictions of David Norris and Gary Dobson in 2012 and uncovered other vital information. The culmination of their combined efforts is that the Met has been forced to accept that Matthew White is a suspect in the attack and is likely to have been the blond-haired sixth attacker.

Last week, the Crown Prosecution Service decided that four officers would not face prosecution for failures in public office for their part in the now discredited police investigation. In 2014, another officer, Detective Sergeant John Davidson, was also exonerated of charges. In a 2006 documentary about the murder of Stephen Lawrence, Davidson was described by then Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Yates as one of the most corrupt officers in the Met. In 1998, Yates was head of Operation Russia, an investigation into a syndicate of corrupt officers in the south-east regional crime squad.

One of the officers under investigation, Neil Putnam, turned supergrass. He disclosed in his evidence a link between DS Davidson and Clifford Norris—the father of David Norris, who murdered Stephen Lawrence. Yates wrote of their association in a memo to the Met while the Macpherson inquiry was still taking evidence. Putnam claims that he understood that his testimony about the link between Norris and Davidson would be reported to the inquiry. The information from Yates and Putnam was not passed to the inquiry. The Met disputes Putnam's claim that he told his handlers of that link, but Putnam repeated it under oath.

[Clive Efford]

I contacted the Met and demanded to know why Yates had accused DS Davidson of corruption in a programme about the murder of Stephen Lawrence. I pointed out that the Macpherson inquiry had not concluded that corruption had hampered the investigation. I was invited to Scotland Yard to meet the Independent Police Complaints Commission and Cressida Dick; I was not permitted to meet John Yates. I was assured that the Met did indeed believe Davidson to be an extremely corrupt officer, but that that did not have anything to do with the Stephen Lawrence investigation. I asked why the Met chose to make that statement in a programme about Stephen Lawrence if it had nothing to do with the investigation. I never got a satisfactory answer. The Met suggested to me that it used the programme to call out Davidson, which I took to be further evidence of the contempt it had for this case.

In 1998, Martin Polaine, a Crown Prosecution Service barrister, was put in charge of reviewing police corruption evidence from Operation Russia. In a corruption proceeding, he told the Old Bailey of a

“recollection I was told by someone in CIB3 of a link between Clifford Norris and Davidson.”

CIB3 was the unit conducting Operation Russia. He also said that when this information was passed to him in late '98, it was considered “of great significance”.

David Hamilton was the head of legal affairs at the Met at that time. In a witness statement to a recent corruption inquiry, he recalled

“a suspicion of an association or contact between Davidson and the Norris family”.

In 2000, he wrote:

“Disclosures relevant to Davidson’s contact with the Norris family could have an adverse effect on the Commissioner’s position in the ongoing High Court action by Mr and Mrs Lawrence.”

Stephen’s family immediately asked for an investigation into the 1998 revelations, which was carried out by the IPCC. It concluded that Putnam, Hamilton and Polaine—an experienced police officer and two senior barristers—were confusing Norris with another member of the Norris family who had been killed two years before Stephen’s murder. That is despite all three stating that that was not correct. Davidson is central to the failure of the original investigation. He handled a key witness, whose information could have identified Matthew White in the first couple of days of the investigation.

Why is the recent identification of Matthew White so significant? Because, of all the attackers, he stood out among the witnesses’ descriptions. He was the one they could describe in detail. Duwayne Brooks, who was with Stephen and was closest to him when he was attacked, always stated that the first attacker was the one he could remember the most and could identify. He has since confirmed that he believes that Matthew White was that person. He described him as having frizzy light brown or blond hair that came down over his ears—completely different from the other attackers. When the evidence is re-read in the light of the BBC findings, it becomes apparent that identifying White would have been key to solving the case at the very start. To put it another way, anyone wanting to hamper the inquiry would want to ensure that Matthew White was never identified as the sixth attacker.

The day after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, James Grant—not his real name—walked into a police station to give information. Such was the detail of his information that it should have been clear to the officers that Grant either was a suspect or had been talking to someone who was present at Stephen’s murder. James Grant was not properly registered as an informant, despite having spoken several times to DS Davidson. In 1997, Grant was interviewed by Kent police, who were called in to carry out a review of the original investigation. He said that he had told his handler DS Davidson back in 1993 that his source was Matthew White. DS Davidson denied that, and the Macpherson inquiry accepted his denial. When that fact was later relayed to the detective in charge of the case, Detective Superintendent Brian Weeden, he expressed shock.

In the two weeks after Stephen’s murder, Matthew White was photographed coming out of a house that was under surveillance. Despite the fact that the descriptions of the sixth attacker matched White, he was not arrested or questioned as a suspect. He was mentioned in the Macpherson report as Witness K but, because he was not considered a suspect, his alibi was never questioned. The BBC has demonstrated that his alibi cannot be true. Even Macpherson himself said that White was a significant person. The final report of the Macpherson inquiry said that Grant’s information

“might have provided the key to the solution of the case in quick time. This was because James Grant’s source was close to the suspects, if he was not involved with them himself.”

In 1997, Kent police asked one of the original investigating officers whether they had ever investigated White. He said:

“I can’t really answer that. I didn’t think after those lines”—whatever that means. One of Kent’s conclusions was that White should be investigated. That was never done. Both Macpherson and Kent police could see that Matthew White was a potential suspect, but the Met failed to act.

The BBC interviewed an informant called Witness Purple. In 1999, Witness Purple gave evidence to the police with details of the attack on Stephen that could only have come from someone who was there. In 2000, White was arrested and questioned about Purple’s information. The police read Purple’s statement to White, at the same time revealing Purple’s identity. Chief Inspector Clive Driscoll told the BBC that that was

“alerting the bad guys...and that cannot be good police work.”

White made no comment in answer and was let go. What could possibly be gained by letting a suspect know the identity of someone giving information against them, other than to silence that informant? Purple stopped co-operating.

Chief Inspector Clive Driscoll began investigating Stephen’s murder in 2006. It was his excellent work that resulted in the convictions of Dobson and Norris in 2012. The day after the convictions, his then superior officer Cressida Dick told him not to bother going after the other suspects. That was despite the judge urging him to do so. Driscoll and his team, to their credit, continued to investigate. He uncovered a vital statement that had been ignored in the original investigation. He discovered that Jack Severs, the stepfather of Matthew White, had given evidence via a friend who was a serving police officer, stating that Matthew White knew more than he had told the police and that he had been present at Stephen’s murder.

That only happened eventually, because the wrong name was recorded for the stepfather. Mr Severs's information was passed to the investigation team, but was not followed up until 20 years later, when Chief Inspector Driscoll tracked down White's stepfather, Mr Severs. He confirmed that White had told him that he had been at the murder scene. The BBC found that that information was given to Detective Inspector Brian Weeden, who was in charge of the investigation. That was confirmed in Brian Weeden's notebook. A meeting with White was planned but never happened.

Consider this for a moment: the officer in charge of a major investigation is contacted by a fellow officer, with information coming from a relative of an individual who, he claims, was present at the murder scene—and it is forgotten. The conclusion of the Macpherson inquiry was that incompetence, not corruption, hampered the investigation. But what the police were expert at, so many times, was mishandling information relating to Matthew White. Can it be explained by incompetence?

Why was James Grant not properly recorded as an informant? Why did the detail of Grant's evidence not lead officers to ask where it came from? Why was the evidence from Matthew White's stepfather overlooked for 20 years? How did the wrong name for the stepfather come to be recorded? Why was finding the blond-haired sixth attacker not given priority from the outset? Why was the similarity between White and the witnesses' descriptions not noted?

Why was White not picked up for questioning after he was photographed coming out of a house that was under surveillance soon after the murder? Why was the link between Grant and White never made by the investigation? Why was the Kent police's recommendation to investigate White never acted on? Why was Witness Purple's identity given to Matthew White when Matthew White was being interviewed as a possible suspect? Why did Cressida Dick order Driscoll not to bother investigating the other suspects? Why did she state, when she shut down the ongoing investigation into Stephen's murder,

"There were no viable lines of inquiry"?

Will the Met now apologise and accept that that was not true? Why was Chief Inspector Clive Driscoll forced to retire when he had uncovered more discarded evidence that warranted further investigation and has resulted in Matthew White being named as the sixth suspect?

All of this means that there should be a further inquiry, which must be completely independent of the Met. What has been exposed goes beyond incompetence. We cannot leave it here.

2.45 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for setting out the historical account, the present situation, the severe failings of the Met police and—as he well said—the corruption that has taken place. I would also like to add that Baroness Lawrence is with us in the Chamber.

The 1999 Macpherson report stated that the investigation was

"marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers."

If that report were reviewed in the light of the information that has recently been brought to our attention, it would probably include the word "corruption" as well.

Over the decades, the Met should have used the Macpherson report as an opportunity to change. It contains 70 key recommendations for our society to show zero tolerance of racism and discrimination. The Home Affairs Committee's 2021 report assessing the progress of the recommendations, some of which are still outstanding, concluded that

"there is a significant problem with confidence in the police within Black communities."

Black communities continue to be under-protected and over-controlled by the police, as has been stated by Robert Reiner, a well-known criminologist.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for his steadfast work on this case and for his speech. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) agree that we are witnessing a deep-rooted cancer of corruption within the Metropolitan police? It appears to be still alive and kicking. After hearing everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said in his speech, does my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East agree that we need three things? The Met needs to be dismantled once and for all, we absolutely need an independent inquiry into this, and the Met commissioner must now be held to account for these actions. This cannot go on any longer. Justice is not being served for the Lawrence family.

Janet Daby: I thank my hon. Friend for her significant contribution. There is clearly disruption and corruption in the Met police; we know that from the recent Casey review and, actually, from many other reviews that I will mention. Where corruption, concealment, cover-up and unnecessary distress have been caused to black communities and the Lawrence family, the police commissioners need to be held to account for the fact that they did not do their job properly. Why did they not do their job properly in the first place?

The Scarman report back in 1981 should have been a chance for the police to progress and change. That, too, was a missed opportunity. I have already mentioned the Casey review, which found the Met police to be institutionally racist, misogynistic and homophobic.

To add insult to injury, a BBC investigation published last month found, as we have heard, that there is evidence of a sixth suspect, Matthew White, being involved in the Stephen Lawrence murder, but that line of inquiry was mishandled by the police at the time. Furthermore, it was announced last week that former Met officers will face no further action over their roles in the 1993 investigation into Stephen's death. That should all be reopened and looked at again because of the corrupt situation that we now know has taken place. To be fair, I am sure we already knew that; it is just that it has been revealed by the BBC.

Last week's decision must be causing unnecessary frustration and distress to the Lawrence family—I am very sorry for that—and the wider community. Where is justice? Why do black lives not matter more than they do at present? The police should be doing their job properly. What are we to expect from them in the future?

The Met needs to change. It must use the events of this year as motivation to reform. It must not fail to address its shortcomings, as it did in 1999 and in 1981. I therefore join Baroness Lawrence in calling for police

[Janet Daby]

officers under investigation for disciplinary offences to hand over data from their personal mobile phones. More investigation needs to take place, and more needs to happen to uncover corruption and bring about real justice.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for securing the debate. One thing that strikes me from conversations with constituents is the slow pace of reforms in the Met police. People are asking for a review of the police conduct and performance legislation, and of the Independent Office for Police Conduct. There have been recent issues with the IOPC—particularly with the person who was heading it up—and a massive lack of trust. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) agree that those things should be looked at in order to regain trust and reform the police system?

Janet Daby: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the many areas where the police and the IOPC are failing. Obviously, the IOPC must not fail, because it needs to be independent and to be able to investigate situations. Those concerns obviously need to be addressed.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the Mayor of London have published a draft Bill, backed by Baroness Lawrence, that would overhaul the regulations governing police conduct and dismissal, and would address some of the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) raised. That intervention is welcome and, in particular, I back its provision to introduce a new duty of candour so that police officers report wrongdoing.

The Macpherson report on the death of Stephen Lawrence highlighted the severe corruption in the Met police, but it is important to point out that not everybody in the Met is corrupt. Some people who join the Met police want to do the right thing and bring about justice. Unfortunately, we see time and again that that is not happening for black individuals, families and communities, and that needs to be addressed.

Faith in our police needs to be restored urgently and we need bold reforms. The Lawrence case was one of the first high-profile examples of knife crime in our society. However, we all know that knife crime has got much worse. Although the police have a responsibility to address that, it is not for them alone; the Government need to step up to ensure that it is being dealt with. There are much wider issues to address in rooting out knife crime. What causes children and young people to carry knives? Why do young people feel so unsafe that they carry knives? Why do they risk harming themselves and others? What is behind all that? Ultimately, why do they risk getting involved in the criminal justice system or, worse, losing their own lives or causing somebody else to pass away?

I invite the Minister to set out what the Government plan to do to secure justice for Stephen Lawrence's family and right the wrongs of past investigations. Will the Government introduce in Parliament the draft Bill created by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham and by the Mayor of London?

2.54 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I found it difficult to sleep last night, thinking about this debate. Knowing that Baroness Lawrence is here today makes the debate very difficult for me. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for highlighting all the mistakes and the corruption, some of which will be new to people who have not heard about it, and for his work to try to secure justice over a number of years.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence was brutal, and he was murdered by white racist thugs. I remember feeling quite sickened at the thought that a teenager who was just like me and my siblings, with a very similar background, had been murdered while he was waiting for a bus. It made us feel in the community that if he was not safe, none of us was safe. I remember those years.

Baroness Lawrence and Neville Lawrence fought a really hard campaign to get justice for their son Stephen. Even though they were fighting a system built on racism and white supremacy, they continued fighting. They were fighting not knowing that they were being spied on. They had full surveillance on them. They were being tracked by the police, so that the police could try to find something on them. Just imagine how clean and law-abiding the Lawrence family are for the police not to have found anything on them.

If the police had found something on the Lawrence family, it would have been in the papers and the press, and they would have highlighted it, because that is how the establishment and institutional racism works. They wanted to sow the seed of doubt, but there was no seed of doubt to be sown, because they found nothing. Just imagine that the police were working so hard to discredit a black family grieving the loss of their eldest son and their brother. They worked harder trying to discredit a black family than they did trying to convict the murderers.

One of the murderer's dads was already in prison. These murderers did not come from the perfect family. They were known as the Krays of Eltham, and they revelled in that, but the police spent time trying to discredit Baroness Lawrence and her family. Every single time a new report comes out or the police fail to act or the IOPC fails to act, it traumatises the Lawrence family and the community, because justice delayed is justice denied.

I remember that moment in 1999, some six years after Stephen was murdered, when the public inquiry launched by the Labour Government concluded with the publishing of the Macpherson report. The words "institutionally racist" were indelibly stamped on the public consciousness. Stephen's tragic murder and the subsequent bungling of its investigation by the Met police revealed to the rest of the country what many of us already knew, and some of us had the misfortune to recognise it from first-hand experience. That includes me, my brothers, my sister and my cousins. I have just written a book, and I have journeyed back through lots of incidents that have happened in my life. As I put them forward to go in the book, the publisher said, "That's enough now, Dawn; you need to stop." She then came back and apologised because, she said, "I realised that's your lived experience."

I went to Elephant and Castle. I never told my parents that I was there. I travelled alone; I did not go with any friends. I wanted to show my support to the

Lawrence family. I also wanted to show the police that we were going to stand up to all the racism and we were not going to be scared. We were told when we were standing there—there was a slope—to be calm and dignified like the Lawrence family. And we were quite calm in the beginning, but when the murderers came out of the building, they had a swagger. They were cocky, and they were cocksure, because they knew they were protected by the Metropolitan police—the people that should have protected the innocent, all of us. Those murderers were protected and they knew it; they showed it. I did not realise how I would feel on that day, but if I had had eggs in my hand I would have thrown them and whatever else I had. Having to witness that undeserved arrogance and privilege was shocking and heartbreaking. It was absolutely palpable in the air, and that is why it kicked off.

As we stand here, 30 years since Stephen's life was brutally taken, his memory and legacy live on through the work of the Stephen Lawrence trust and the work of the Lawrence family, and so does the ongoing fight for justice for him and his family. We are in this place not for show but to make society better. If we cannot highlight what is wrong with society and get it changed, what is the point?

Thirty years later, the Casey report has highlighted that the Metropolitan police is still institutionally racist. The current commissioner does not like that term. Well, I do not like the term, but I also do not like what it does. I do not like the effects of institutional racism and its consequences for the black community. I do not like the fact that black people are discriminated against more than any other group because of institutional racism. I do not like the fact that black people are five times more likely to die in police custody than their white counterparts. I do not like the fact that black people get convicted at a higher rate than their white counterparts for comparable offences. That is institutional racism. If you can't name it, you can't fix it.

The Government's determination to have a fake war and say that there is no such thing as institutional racism is a disgrace. The Government's first job should be to protect its citizens—all citizens—and they fail to do that time and again. Let me be clear: it is a matter of national importance that our public institutions are held to account in order to meet and maintain the highest standards and to continue to be held in esteem. It is not just, "Well, that's the Metropolitan police." Some people feel protected; some are over-policed, under-protected and underserved. The Lawrence family are an exemplar family, but it has taken its toll. Because they were not able to shame them in any way, it is still continuing.

The police talk about their reputation. To be honest, if the police were a bank account, they would be in severe deficit. We are policed by consent. With every interaction with a citizen they either add to the bank account or withdraw, and the Met police are in debt. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) said that perhaps the Met police should be dismantled. I think the work that needs to be done on the Met cannot be done by anybody who has served in the Met. Cressida Dick was not a good commissioner, and Mark Rowley is slowly losing my confidence. The work that needs to be done is so deep that it needs an independent person from outside who will not be scared

by the threats against them by members of the police service who want to keep the status quo. That is not to say that all police officers are corrupt, racist, homophobic or misogynistic—they are not—but the institution is. If we want to make the police service better for the good police officers, we have to change the institution. We also have to change all the institutions that surround the justice system and are underpinned by it, including the courts and the IOPC.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said, it is now patently evident that those who were tasked with carrying out a public duty of great importance and significance following Stephen's murder failed gravely to meet the standards that anyone would have expected. In no way do the years that have passed dull the desire to delve deeper into what now seems to be the very murky culture that pervaded the Metropolitan police at the time of Stephen's murder. What may have been considered speculation during the early years of the investigation can now be classed as fact. When people were saying that the Lawrences were being surveilled, the police said that was not true. When people were saying that the police were being racist, we were told that was not true. Now we know it is all fact.

The catalogue of errors is a testament to the failed institution of the Metropolitan police, which has been resistant to well-overdue reform. There are too many errors for it to be just an error; it is institutional. Just imagine: as we have heard, information about one of the key suspects was not followed up until two decades later, when he was dead. It is almost like somebody did not want to offend the murderer or hold them to account, so they waited till they were dead before admitting that they were involved in the murder of Stephen Lawrence. It is as insulting as it is offensive. To think that nothing will be done about it—we cannot allow that, especially not in this place.

I will end on some words from Baroness Lawrence. In her unique, dignified way—it is incredible—she said that she has been left "bitterly disappointed" by the fact that four former Metropolitan police officers will not face charges of misconduct in public life over their handling of the initial six weeks of the 1993 investigation. One report said that they are old. I do not care how old they are; they should stand trial and be accountable for what they did. They should not be living on a fat police pension. Baroness Lawrence said:

"Not a single police officer lost his job, or will lose his pension, or pay a fine or spend a day behind bars whilst I will continue to grieve the loss of my son. This CPS decision has caused me immense distress and little thought has been given to me as a mother who has lost her son. This is a disgrace."

Justice delayed is justice denied. It is time that justice is delivered.

3.8 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for securing this important debate.

It was an honour to be invited to attend the moving memorial service on the 30th anniversary of Stephen Lawrence's murder in April, but it is simply staggering that we are still hearing about new instances of police malpractice. It is thanks to the determined and unflinching campaigning of Baroness Lawrence that two men were

[*Kate Osamor*]

convicted of Stephen Lawrence's murder, so I pay tribute to her for her hard work. We must not forget that she and her family were spied on by the special demonstration squad—an example of the suspicion with which the state treats black people who are pursuing justice against all odds.

Sadly, we know from Baroness Casey's important report that black people still cannot expect to receive equal treatment from the Met compared with some of their fellow Londoners. A horrific example is the case of the police officers taking and sharing pictures of Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry after their brutal murders. Sadly, without real commitment to change, we will only see more and more families being let down and failed by the police, with their trauma exacerbated and, more importantly, nobody being held to account.

My hon. Friends have already spoken on this heart-wrenching topic. I want to lay three recommendations before the Minister. First, we need to see leadership from political leaders. Despite the report by Louise Casey, neither the Home Secretary nor the Met commissioner has accepted the labelling of the Met as institutionally racist. Unless they accept that the Met is institutionally racist, the work will go no further, nothing will happen and the Met will stay as it is. It is rotten to the core and needs to be looked at by people who are not in the Met police. Without such work, we as Londoners will only sit back in horror, knowing that another family will be put in the same position as Baroness Lawrence.

Secondly, it is essential that police officers face greater sanctions for misconduct. The absence of greater sanctions will only serve to breed more contempt in the police force. More importantly, police officers will know that nothing will happen to them if they treat Londoners with the same disrespect that they have shown on previous occasions and which is on record.

Thirdly, it is essential that we scrutinise the progress made on implementing all of the recommendations made by the undercover policing inquiry. The report needs to be brought to Parliament so that all parliamentarians can read it and question the Ministers responsible for it. Lastly, I support the creation of a national oversight mechanism to report on the Government making those changes. I hope that the Minister will address those recommendations when she winds up the debate.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): I call Anne McLaughlin.

3.12 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Davies.

"We wonder why people become disillusioned. I am sure that all those decades ago when the Macpherson report was first published, there were many who heaved a sigh of relief. Its aim, after all, was to 'increase trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities'. I am also sure that all those decades ago, when the aim of the report was stated to be 'the elimination of racist prejudice and disadvantage and the demonstration of fairness in all aspects of policing', many felt they had finally achieved progress. I am sure that everyone involved was aware that Rome was not built in a day, but had some hope, and maybe even allowed themselves a little confidence that life for those experiencing racism would soon change for the better.

The family of Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered and then denied justice because of the colour of his skin—the family in response to whom the Macpherson report came about—perhaps felt when that report was published that his death had not been completely in vain. I have met Stephen's brother, Stuart Lawrence, and of course we all know or know of his father, Neville Lawrence, and his mother, Baroness Doreen Lawrence",

who is with us here today. Anyone who listens to Stuart or his parents

"or reads his book, 'Silence is Not An Option', begins to understand the catastrophic impact Stephen's death had on everyone in his family and how they have all had to work so hard, almost every minute of every day, simply to survive.

To a lesser degree, the impact on whole communities was also devastating and life-changing. To have the hope that things would get better for other mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters when the report was published 22 years ago, and then to come to the conclusion that Doreen Lawrence reached recently, namely that 'things have become really stagnant and nothing seems to have moved'".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall, 7 July 2022; Vol. 717, c. 419WH.*]

You will have noticed, Mr Davies, that I said 22 years ago, when it was in fact 23 years ago. That is because what I have just said is the first page of a speech that I made here in Westminster Hall in July 2022, a year ago, about the Macpherson report. And, as I said, Doreen Lawrence said at the time:

"Things have become stagnant and nothing seems to have moved".

That is why I am saying this again: because it is still absolutely relevant today. I have been to so many debates on this issue in this place, but nothing ever moves.

How must Baroness Lawrence feel now, when things have moved forward but there is no progress and no justice? The BBC investigation has named the sixth suspect, but there has been no progress and there will never be any justice. A decision has also been made not to prosecute any of the four retired detectives who ran that failed and corrupt investigation, so there will be no progress and no justice either. I heard a police officer say on the radio recently—I cannot remember the exact words—that it was time for us to let them have peace. He was talking about the retired detectives, not the family of Stephen Lawrence.

Baroness Lawrence has said of the BBC investigation:

"It should not have taken a journalist to do the job that a huge, highly resourced institution should have done."

She is absolutely right. Why did it take the BBC to conduct an investigation when the Met already has far more resources to conduct one?

The Macpherson report is about England and Wales, but Scotland is not immune to any of these issues. I know that this debate is about Stephen Lawrence, but I just want to briefly mention Sheku Bayoh, whom I also talked about in last year's debate. He died after being stopped in the street by two police officers, who were then joined by another seven police officers, in Kirkcaldy in Fife in May 2015. A public inquiry is under way and I hope to get along to it soon. However, it is now eight years since he died and his family still do not have any answers.

How did a fit young man in his 30s—he was a brother, son, dad, partner and friend—who had no weapons on him end up dead after encountering the police? I cannot answer that question—I will leave that to the inquiry—but I will say that in any other situation in which nine people confronted one person and that one person ended up dead, those nine people would, at

the very least, be taken in for questioning. Mr Davies, you will never hear me or anyone else in my party claiming that Scotland or our police force is racism-free.

Let us go back to the speech I made a year ago—I am getting very good at juggling my speeches. I quoted Iain Livingstone, the chief constable of Police Scotland, as saying that there was a need for

“practical, firm, progressive, visible action”.—[*Official Report*, 7 July 2022; Vol. 717, c. 419WH.]

Now, let me fast-forward to May of this year, when he made a statement addressing the matter of institutional racism in policing. I will read out parts of that statement, because it shows how straightforward it can and should be for the Met and for the Government to acknowledge institutional racism in policing. He said:

“Police Scotland has grown into an organisation known to be compassionate, values based, and highly competent. It is well regarded nationally, extremely well regarded internationally, but I know it can improve, must improve.

Institutional racism, sexism and institutional discrimination have become iconic terms in the vital battle to tackle injustice. Police officers and staff, including police leaders, can be conflicted both in acknowledging their existence and in using such terms, fearing it would unfairly condemn dedicated and honourable colleagues”—

of which, no doubt, there are many—

“or that it means no progress has been made since the 1990s.

Truly, I recognise and understand that conflict. I have experienced that conflict myself over a number of years.

The meaning of institutional racism set out by Sir William Macpherson in 1999 in his report on the appalling murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 is, rightly, very demanding.

The phrase, the terminology, however, can be and often is misinterpreted or misrepresented as unfair and personal critical assessments of police officers and police staff as individuals.

That is not the case.”

He is right—it is not the case. He went on to say:

“Does institutional discrimination mean our police officers and police staff are racist and sexist? No. It absolutely does not.”

That does not mean that there are not plenty of them who are, but this does not mean that they are. He says:

“I have great confidence in the character and values of our people. I am proud of Police Scotland and I am proud of my colleagues, proud of my officers and staff.

So I know and have shared the reservations and concerns about acknowledging that institutional discrimination exists in policing.

However, it is right for me, the right thing for me to do as Chief Constable, to clearly state that institutional racism, sexism, misogyny and discrimination exist. Police Scotland is institutionally racist and discriminatory. Publicly acknowledging these institutional issues exist is essential to our absolute commitment to championing equality and becoming an anti-racist Service. It is also critical to our determination to lead wider change in society.”

That is what the Met should do and what the Government should do—just acknowledge it. It is a start, but it is a really good start. Why can they not just say the words?

Humza Yousaf, Scotland’s First Minister, said that this statement was “monumental” and “historic”. He said:

“I hope that it also serves as a reminder to all of us that, whatever organisation we belong to, we have a responsibility to question the organisations that we lead...and to reflect on whether we are doing enough to dismantle not only institutional racism but the structural discrimination that exists for many people”—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 25 May 2023; c. 10.]

The chief constable made the point that words are not enough, and he is absolutely right. Police Scotland has made a great start, and this Government and the Met police need to look at what Police Scotland has said and just own up to it. It is only words; it has to be followed up by actions. We now have a Prime Minister and a First Minister of Scotland who come from a minority ethnic background, but let us not get carried away and think that that has solved racism, because it certainly will not. Again, it is a start, but it is about what we do after that.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford). He gave us an utterly shocking and deeply depressing story, but it is one that must be told over and over, and it is one that we should never stop being shocked at. That is what happens—we hear something so many times, and we get used to it—but we must never stop being shocked at it.

I support the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) in asking the Government about the plan for justice for the Lawrence family. Is there one? If so, what is it? The hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) talked, in a really emotional speech, about the impact on her and about her visit to Elephant and Castle. She described so well and so vividly the swagger of those murderers, who knew they were being protected.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) and others reminded us that the Lawrence family were spied on. We need to keep telling everybody that, because whenever I tell anybody, they cannot believe it. The first time you hear it, you cannot forget it. We have to keep telling everybody what happened to them. She also called for more sanctions. I was stunned when I discovered how few sanctions there are against serving police officers right across these islands.

Dawn Butler: With regard to sanctions, is the hon. Member surprised, like me, that if a police officer fails their vetting, they can still work in the police, and nothing happens to them? What we need—I hope the Minister is listening—is independent vetting and psychological testing for every single serving police officer.

Anne McLaughlin: I absolutely agree. One of the things that shocked me most when I read through the briefing notes was that someone can fail their vetting but still be a serving police officer. It did not just shock me; it terrified me. I hope I never need to come in contact with a serving police officer who has failed their vetting.

I end by simply expressing solidarity with anyone fighting racism. I will do my best to be an ally. I express solidarity especially with the family of Sheku Bayoh—I offer to do whatever I can, and hope they can draw strength from others as they go through the public inquiry—and most particularly with the family of Stephen Lawrence, for the incredible strength they have shown, which they should never have had to show, over the many decades they have spent fighting for justice for their son.

3.25 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Davies.

[Sarah Jones]

May I start by echoing everybody else in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for giving such a detailed and harrowing list of all the failures in the way that this case was investigated, from the start right to the present day? There are some parallels with other cases, such as the Stephen Port murders, where four young men were murdered and multiple others were raped, and the Daniel Morgan inquiry, following his murder in 1987. There are similarities in terms of professional curiosity and not being interested in following leads, unconscious bias and structural bias—the structures of the institutions themselves not being equipped to solve these murders—and the conclusion, in some of those cases, that it was down to incompetence rather than corruption, when it is hard to see how there was not corruption.

Dawn Butler: The Daniel Morgan inquiry said that the police were institutionally corrupt; indeed, Cressida Dick was named in that report as somebody who stopped the investigation from continuing. Does my hon. Friend agree that every single report on the Met highlights another area of discrimination that needs to be tackled?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. She is right, and one thing that Baroness Casey found in her report was a defensiveness. That is why it was first suggested in the Daniel Morgan inquiry that we should introduce a legal duty of candour, because there is a big difference between that and asking somebody for information. In that case, the Met was asked for certain information and it gave it, but it also knew other things that it did not offer. That is the difference with a duty of candour, and that came from the Hillsborough inquiry. It is one of the law changes that the Hillsborough campaigners are asking for, because, similarly, information was not willingly given and there was a defensiveness.

Janet Daby: The reason for a duty of candour—which is something that the Victims and Prisoners Bill is introducing—is absolutely what my hon. Friend has set out, but it is also to avoid corruption, and corruption has taken place. The duty of candour can stop it, and it starts from the premise that corruption on the part of the police has been known in very serious cases.

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the institutional problems is that we do not have systems in place to stop these things happening in the first place; therefore they can happen, and they do.

My hon. Friend set up the all-party parliamentary group on children in police custody and will be looking at the disproportionality of children in custody. She has a lot of expertise in that area and spoke very eloquently about it. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) gave an incredibly powerful speech and of course reminded us about the Lawrence family being tracked—which, as the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), said, is one of the most horrific aspects of all of this. My hon. Friend said that we are in this place not for show but to make things better, and that is incredibly important: we are not here to prove a point one way or the other, but to make things better. I hope that the Minister responds in that spirit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) mentioned the murders of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, which are of course all wrapped up in the same issues and are, again, some of the most horrific things I have ever read about. The grace of their mother in showing leadership and behaving in the way she has—similarly to how Baroness Lawrence has behaved—is also quite extraordinary. I know for a fact that I would not behave in that way.

Dawn Butler: Mina Smallman, the mother of Bibaa and Nicole, is absolutely phenomenal. Is it not also the case that mothers who have lost their children in such tragic circumstances should not need to be so graceful or dignified to get justice for their children? But they often need to be.

Sarah Jones: That is a really important point. On that point, it is no coincidence that the majority of my colleagues on the Labour Benches who are speaking today are women who happen to be black. It should not be on their shoulders to fix these problems. They have experienced racism all through their lives, and now we expect them to fix the problems as well. That is not right. We have the same debate when we talk about the need for more black officers in policing. Yes, we need more, but it should not be on them to solve the problems of the police. It should be on all of us. We all need to take that responsibility, especially those of us who have not had to bear the burden of racism.

Janet Daby: Just to clarify, I do not see it as my job to bear that or to fix it; I see it as the responsibility of our whole community. It is also very much the responsibility of the Government, and it is the responsibility of us in the Opposition to ensure that the Government are doing what they need to do to address society's wrongdoings, such as discrimination in the area of racism and prejudice and in other areas. Obviously, we are speaking about this issue because we know that the police have not dealt with this situation as they should have; indeed, they have protected themselves rather than protecting, in this case, the innocent.

Sarah Jones: That is a very good point, and I completely understand what my hon. Friend says.

Like everybody else, I pay tribute to the Lawrence family and to Baroness Lawrence, who is here today. They have had to fight and campaign for so long. We think of them every time there is another news story and they have to relive the trauma of what happened, which must be incredibly difficult. They have faced what no parent should ever have to bear.

The failures in this case run deep, as we have heard. It is extremely troubling that, after 30 years, information about those failings is still emerging. It is also unacceptable that the Crown Prosecution Service sat on the IOPC file—the dossier into alleged mishandling—for three years. We need an independent investigation into what happened, so that we can establish everything that has gone wrong. As has already been mentioned, Baroness Lawrence has said that she is bitterly disappointed and will be seeking a review, which limits, up to a point, what we can say about it. It is clear, and the message to the Minister is clear: the Home Office must not stand back. The Government have a role here and real leadership is needed. We need the Government to commit to

engaging seriously with the issue of police reform, to avoid repeating failures and rebuild trust in communities that have lost that trust.

Other Members have talked about the journey from the Macpherson report to the Casey report. Undoubtedly some good changes were made in that period, but equally Louise Casey finds that a lot of things have not improved. I pay tribute to Baroness Casey for the thoroughness of her review. She described the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the Macpherson report as irrevocably changing the nature of policing in the UK. It changed the understanding, the investigation and the prosecution of racist crimes nationwide.

Macpherson rightly called for police forces to be representative of their communities, but we have made very slow progress on that front. At the current rate of recruitment and attrition, the Met will manage to increase its black, Asian and ethnic minority representation to only 22% of all officers to reflect the population by 2055. If the Met continued to improve its black, Asian and ethnic minority recruitment by an additional 1% each year from this year onwards, it would take nearly 40 years to reach an officer group that was proportionate. I represent Croydon Central, and I remember going out with the new recruits, who are the ones who carry out stop and search in our communities. There were 80 of them, and not a single one of them was black. There is a very diverse population in Croydon, so that does not work and it needs to be changed.

The trust that people have in policing is an important part of being able to solve crimes. If people do not trust the police, the police cannot solve crimes. In 2021-22, only 43% of black Londoners believed that the Met did a good job locally, while 33% of black Londoners thought that the Met did a good job across London. Only 46% of Londoners think that the Met treats everyone fairly, and only 14% of black Londoners think that the Met treats black people fairly. Looking at the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime surveys, we can see that those figures have fallen—rapidly, in some cases—in recent years. Things have got worse.

It has already been mentioned that Louise Casey talked about black Londoners being under-protected and over-policed. That is a really important issue that I would like the Minister to comment on. I think we are going backwards, and the approach that the Government are taking is making the issue harder to tackle. Most hon. Members present were in the Chamber recently when the Home Secretary made a statement about stop and search. She has gone further than even the previous Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), in almost denying that there is a problem that needs fixing. For example, she said:

“Suggestions that stop and search is a means of victimising young black men have it precisely the wrong way around...Black people account for about 3% of our population, yet almost a third of under-25s killed by knives are black.”—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2023; Vol. 734, c. 569.]

However, that implies that those figures are somehow equivalent, and of course, they are not. Something like 120 young people under the age of 25 are murdered every year, so we are talking about 40 or 50 young black people, tops, and 3% is 2 million people. So there are 2 million people who are black in this country, and a very small number of murders, so we cannot equate the two. The implication that the Home Secretary seemed

to be making—that that meant it was fine that people were being over-policed—is very dangerous and sad. I do not think that even this Government have been saying up to this point.

The under-protection of black people in London in terms of crime is really acute. The figures showing evidence of that are in Louise Casey's report. Indeed, disproportionality is not questioned by anybody—apart from potentially our Home Secretary. Whether it is the National Police Chiefs' Council in its report on racism—which covers the whole of policing—or the inspectorate, the IOPC or the Met itself, everybody accepts that there is a huge problem. I worry that the Government are taking a line that questions that. In Wales—the hon. Member for Glasgow North East said it is similar in Scotland—there is an active anti-racism strategy led by the Government across the board, so it is much easier for the police and the leaders of policing to do the right thing. It is actively harder for them to the right thing under this Government, which is a great shame.

It is clear that we need change across the board. Labour wants a complete overhaul of the way the police are vetted and recruited. We want misconduct to be dealt with and training to be introduced. All those things need significant reform. The issue of vetting is even worse than hon. Members have said. It is not just that people can fail their vetting and still be police officers; it is not among a police officer's powers to sack someone because they have failed their vetting.

There are problems across the board with the way that vetting, interviews and misconduct processes work, and structural racism is built into all those processes. Black police officers are much more likely to have a much shorter time in the Met and are much more likely to be subject to disciplinary proceedings. It is at every level, so we need to reform all those things.

We need to look at things such as stop and search, Child Q strip searches and adultification. There needs to be much better training, and the law needs to reflect what is right and wrong. The approach to children must be much more child-centred and safeguarding-centred.

People have asked whether we should break up the Met. Louise Casey said that we should give the new commissioner two years, and if at that point we have not seen significant reform and change, there is a case for breaking it up. An administrative change to structures does not necessarily change anything. Putting a group in a different team does not necessarily lead to change, but Louise Casey sensibly concluded that if the pace of change is not sufficient and we do not see more improvements, we need to do more.

I have talked about the change that we need to see, and that sits alongside the impact on policing. The good police officers in the Met struggle to do a good job. Louise Casey said that austerity has “disfigured” the Met. There is an absence of neighbourhood policing, so police officers do not have the ability to build relationships with their communities. We have seen groups such as the Territorial Support Group go into communities they do not know and make bad judgments about who they stop and search.

Across the country, we have a shortfall of 7,000 detectives. We do not have enough good detectives who can solve crimes, be curious, ask the right questions and be trained. Although there is now direct entry into

[Sarah Jones]

detective work—which is good and has led to more diversity in the workforce, so that a different type of person joining the police—we need to go much further. There needs to be much better training on issues such as racism and violence against women and girls. We need to change these ingrained cultures through better training.

I ask the Minister to respond to all the points that have been made. The Met has struggled to reform, but these problems exist across the country—six forces are in special measures—so what will the Home Secretary and the Home Office do to raise standards and reform policing? Does the Minister accept that there is disproportionality within the system and structural issues that mean that racism, misogyny, sexism and homophobia continue unchanged? Will she back the calls from everyone here to change the way we vet and train officers, and deal with police misconduct?

Our thoughts are with the Lawrence family and with Baroness Lawrence, who is in the Public Gallery. I am so sorry that she has had to go through this. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central said, we are here for a reason—it is not just for show. We need change, but even after so many years, it is possible. These things are not inevitable; we can and must change things. I hope the Minister sees the urgency of the task.

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Miss Sarah Dines): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am pleased to see the Public Gallery so full. I am particularly pleased to see Baroness Lawrence here. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for securing the debate. As was abundantly clear throughout his remarks, this is a subject of particular significance for him and his constituents. I appreciate the insight, work and knowledge he has brought to bear on this subject and discussion. My thanks also go to other Members who have contributed.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence remains one of the most disgraceful and devastating crimes our country has ever seen. We all remember the collective sense of grief and shock we felt at the time, and the impact that that heinous act has had on all of us 30 years on. The case left an indelible mark on policing, and that theme has been explored today and in previous debates. Above all, it is important to remember that this started with the loss of a young man with the whole of his life ahead of him. Although it is understandable that our discussions often focus on the wider questions for policing and our society more generally, we must always keep that terrible tragedy at the forefront of our minds.

We speak of Stephen and the future that was denied to him. We think of his family, who have endured a long and difficult fight for justice, and who have been indefatigable in keeping his memory alive. I fully understand the continued interest in this case and will endeavour to be as helpful as I can and as full in my comments as possible, in the short time that remains. That said, I hope colleagues will understand if I restrict my remarks to some degree, due to the sensitivities and, of course, the fact that the Metropolitan police is operationally independent.

I turn to 26 June, when the Met issued an updated statement on Stephen's murder. The Met recognised that although two men were convicted of Stephen's murder in 2012, other suspects have not yet been brought to justice. The Met statement explained that Matthew White, who passed away in 2021, first came to its attention as a witness in 1993. He was arrested and interviewed in March 2000 and in December 2013, and a file was received by the Crown Prosecution Service in May 2005 and October 2014.

The Met stated that on both occasions the CPS advised that there was no realistic prospect of conviction of White for any offence. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Matt Ward said, as part of that statement, that unfortunately too many mistakes were made in the initial investigation and they continue to have an impact. On the 30th anniversary of Stephen's murder, Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley apologised for the Met's failings, and the deputy assistant commissioner repeated that apology.

I know that that update from the Met will have come as a blow to Stephen's family. Their resilience and courage in seeking justice has shone through for the last three decades. Their frustration is understandable, and it is right that the police have apologised. In May, the Met commissioned a routine forensic review of key exhibits to consider whether new scientific processes could advance the case. That investigation remains in an inactive phase. As I have said, I fully understand the interest in the investigation and the desire for answers, but I hope colleagues will understand if I refrain from further speculation or comment in that regard.

The IOPC investigation collated evidence related to the actions and omissions of the four officers in the early stages of the investigation into Stephen's murder. A file was then provided to the CPS to answer whether anyone should face charges. This was a vast investigation that had been undertaken by the National Crime Agency under the IOPC's direction. It involved the gathering and analysis of several million pages of information and intelligence, spanning many years. I understand that NCA investigators also interviewed more than 150 people, including serving and former police officers and staff involved in the original murder inquiry, relevant witnesses and others, including journalists with in-depth knowledge of the original investigation.

The CPS applied tests, as set out in the code for Crown prosecutors, regarding the evidence provided. I recognise that the announcement made by the CPS that no criminal charges will be brought against the four suspects will be very disappointing for the Lawrences and Duwayne Brooks. The CPS has offered the victims the right to review its decision, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this stage.

I turn to the points made by the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) about the Met needing to change and the Casey review. The publication of Baroness Casey's report on the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Met made for very sobering reading, and it is paramount that public trust in the Met is restored. Although primary accountability lies with the Mayor of London, I know the Home Secretary will continue to hold the commissioner and the Mayor accountable for delivering the necessary improvements, as will the Policing Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who apologises for not being here today.

Although we have seen progress in several areas since the awful murder of Stephen, there is much to do. It is imperative that by working with key partners, including His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services, the Met continues the process of restoring public confidence that it is getting the high-quality service that people desire and that we all have a right to expect. The Government have confidence in the commissioner's leadership, and in his plans to turn around the Met and ensure that the force is delivering for all communities.

I turn now to the points made by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) in relation to institutional racism. Without question, discriminatory attitudes and behaviours have no place in policing, and any allegations of racism are deeply disturbing. We expect police officers to take urgent action to root out discrimination. Allegations of police wrongdoing are dealt with under a comprehensive framework, either by police forces or the IOPC. I understand that there is much debate around the definition of the term "institutional racism" in the Met. The commissioner is committed to tackling issues of racism and building back trust in the police in the form of the force's "Turnaround Plan 2023-2025"—the two years that have been mentioned—which has core themes of more trust, less crime and high standards. The most important thing is to judge the Met on its actions rather than words.

I turn to other recommendations made by the hon. Member for Edmonton. I listened carefully to what she said about her four recommendations, and her second recommendation was to have greater sanctions. The Casey review has looked at the effectiveness of the disciplinary system, so that the public can be confident that it is fair but effective at removing officers who fall far short of the standards expected of them. I have met the commissioner, and I have heard that he is extremely interested in this area. At this stage, I have confidence in him.

The Casey review also examined whether the current three-tier performance system is effective in being able to dismiss officers who fail to perform the duties expected of their rank and role. To restore public confidence in policing, the Home Office and the police forces have undertaken a series of actions to ensure that police vetting is fit for purpose, including the need for police forces to check their officers and staff against the national police database, and to root out those unfit for service. Officers who fall short of the standard expected of them must be identified and dealt with appropriately, and I look forward to work being done in this area.

Clive Efford: In relation to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, I have gone back over all the evidence, and there were clear failings in the investigation—so many in certain aspects of it that it is difficult to say it was incompetence. If we do not have an independent investigation, away from the Met, how will the public have confidence in the outcome?

Miss Dines: I look forward to the work that Baroness Casey outlined in terms of having more confidence in the Met police. It is right that such work is done, that there is a little time given to do that work, and that we must expect progress.

I will try to respond to all the recommendations put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton. In relation to scrutiny, I am aware that members of the Lawrence

family have been granted core participant status in the undercover policing inquiry. The inquiry was established in 2015 to examine undercover policing operations by English and Welsh forces since 1968. On 29 June 2023, the undercover policing inquiry published an interim report for tranche 1 of its investigations. The full report is publicly available, and I am sure Members have had a look at it. Tranche 1 of the inquiry's investigations examined special demonstration squad officers and managers, and those affected by deployments between 1968 and 1982.

The Home Office is grateful to Sir John Mitting for the report, and the Department will carefully consider its contents. It is an interim report and is restricted to the time period covered by tranche 1. As the inquiry's investigations are ongoing, it would not be appropriate for the Government to comment at this stage, but the recommendation suggested by the hon. Member for Edmonton is very much in mind.

Sarah Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Dines: Very briefly. There is a lot to get through and I need to respond to everything everyone said.

Sarah Jones: When the Government respond, it would be helpful for a Minister to come to the House and make an oral statement so that we can all have the opportunity to comment, because we have not had that debate.

Miss Dines: I am grateful for that intervention. I will pass that message on to the Home Secretary and the Policing Minister.

On police culture, I disagree with one thing that the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) said, which was that the Home Secretary was not leading enough in her role—I think "standing back" was the phrase that the hon. Member used. That has not been my experience of the efforts put in by the Home Secretary, who has made it consistently clear, both in public and in private to me, that the culture and standards in policing need to improve as a matter of urgency. I hope we can agree on that.

Examining the root causes of poor and toxic cultures is a key focus of part 2 of the Angiolini inquiry, which is now under way. The College of Policing is also currently updating the code of ethics, which plays a key role in instilling the right principles and standards from the start of a police officer's career. The Policing Minister is certainly holding leaders to account in this area.

I will briefly mention that whenever, in my safeguarding role, I visit a police force that I have not visited before, one of the first questions I ask is: what is the ethnic diversity of new recruits and existing officers? That must be very much in everybody's mind. We need a police force that reflects better the whole of society.

The Government and the public rightly expect the highest standards from our police officers. The ability of the police to perform their core functions—tackling crime and keeping the public safe—is dependent on their capacity to maintain the confidence of the public. As part of the Inclusive Britain strategy, the Government are committed to developing a new national framework for policing partners, including police and crime commissioners.

[Miss Dines]

Police powers such as stop and search and the use of force must be scrutinised properly at a local level. That will help to create tangible improvements in trust and confidence between the police and the communities they serve by improving public understanding of how and why the police use their powers and will help account for any disparities. Alongside that, the Home Office is committed to seeking and removing unnecessary barriers that prevent the use of body-worn video, which will be implemented in the framework. Work is well under way on the community scrutiny framework, which we aim to publish in due course.

Abena Oppong-Asare: Will the Government look at the use of tasers? Members of the community are concerned about them and the way they are used.

Miss Dines: I will ask the Policing Minister to write to the hon. Member about that. We have only two minutes left, and I want to leave a minute for the Member in charge to wind up.

I offer my thanks to the hon. Member for Eltham for securing this debate. I am acutely conscious of the significance of the case not only for the Lawrence family, but for the Britain that I want to see and for Britain's policing as a whole. My thoughts are with the family of Stephen for the loss of their loved one. They had such a shattering loss. We cannot bring him back, but we can do more to strain every sinew to learn every possible lesson from that awful crime.

3.58 pm

Clive Efford: It is a tragedy that the case still casts a shadow over the Metropolitan police. The mistakes that have been made, particularly those in relation to evidence relating to Matthew White, are too numerous to be coincidental. They are worthy of an investigation independent of the Metropolitan police. Even a review by Chief Inspector Clive Driscoll might suffice, because he is the one who stands out among the Met officers as somebody committed to seeing justice in this case. We often hear people talk about victims; if there any victims we should listen to, it is the Lawrence family. We should talk to them about how we can resolve the issue and take it forward.

When Cressida Dick closed down the investigation into Stephen's murder, she said that no further viable lines of inquiry were open. That was not true. The Met have to accept that. We cannot leave it there.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Metropolitan Police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Overseas Aid

[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 23 May and 4 July 2023, on the FCDO's approach to sexual and reproductive health, HC 1216.]

4 pm

Philip Davies (in the Chair): I will call Sarah Champion to move the motion and then call the Minister to respond. As they are both experienced parliamentarians, they will not really need me to say that—as is the convention for 30-minute debates—there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered sexual and reproductive health and rights and overseas aid.

As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your guidance, Mr Davies.

The Minister is well versed in this topic. He knows that it is essential we ensure that women and girls are empowered to make decisions about their own bodies and that they are free to pursue education, employment and prosperity on their chosen path in life, wherever they are in the world. This is a cause that I care deeply about, and I am delighted to have sexual and reproductive health and rights—SRHR—as a key priority this year for the Select Committee on International Development, which I chair. As part of the Committee's inquiry, I am very much looking forward to hearing from the Minister of State for Development and Africa on this issue in September. As the inquiry is ongoing, I will focus on a separate piece of work, largely carried out by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. I will also refer to evidence that has been submitted to IDC.

Last week, I had the pleasure of hosting the launch of RCOG's new report, "Getting Back on Track: The Case for Reinvestment in Global Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights". The report notes the achievements of UK advocacy, leadership and overseas aid on SRHR over the last decade, as well as the impact of recent aid cuts on SRHR and gender equality. The testimonies from RCOG members and other healthcare professionals working on women's health around the world who have experienced the devastating impact of cuts on the frontline are essential to understanding the issue. I strongly encourage the Minister and his officials to consider closely the findings and recommendations of the report.

The moral obligation to support women and girls on SRHR is clear. Bodily autonomy is the foundation upon which women and girls can exercise their full rights. The rights of women and girls are being rolled back in some parts of the world, which is infuriating and shows that the UK's advocacy for global gender equality and SRHR has never been more important.

My Committee has heard from several organisations about the importance of UK overseas aid to delivering comprehensive SRHR services and achieving universal access for every woman and girl. UK aid can and does make a real difference to the lives of women and girls around the world, but we must continue and expand our support in a sustainable way.

It is important to look at this issue through an intersectional lens. The Committee has heard that the most marginalised face additional barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services. They are often not delivered in a way that is accessible to women with disabilities. That could be as simple as a lack of a wheelchair ramp into the clinic or a lack of sign language interpretation. LGBTQ+ people can also find it difficult to access services due to the stigma, discrimination and even criminalisation of same-sex relationships and gender expression. We must do all we can to change that. I am very proud that our embassies around the world stand up for those rights.

Not only is investing in SRHR the right thing to do, but it makes financial sense. United Nations Population Fund research shows that for every \$1 invested in family planning and maternal health in low-income countries, over \$8 is accrued by averting unintended pregnancies and reducing the demand for, and cost of, maternal and other health services. Organisations such as the UNFPA are vital actors in the SRHR space, which is why it was so disheartening to hear it tell the Committee recently of the devastating impact of UK Government cuts on its services. In 2021, UK aid to UNFPA's supplies partnership was cut by 85% with very little warning. Its only clue as to what was coming was from media reports about the UK's reduction in official development assistance spending from 0.7% to 0.5%.

UNFPA provides 40% of the world's contraceptive supply, reaching approximately 20 million women and young people every year. It told the Committee that because of the lack of funding, it had to immediately cut the commodities it provides—contraception—by 30% and has since had to make sweeping cuts across the board. While there has been a path to the restoration of funding for UNFPA supplies, the UK Government ultimately remain off track to meet their 2019 commitment of £425 million, with support for the UNFPA's core operating fund remaining significantly reduced. Will the Minister make a commitment today that the UK Government will restore support to the UNFPA's core operating fund alongside their existing commitments to their supplies partnership?

Supporting women and girls to take control of their reproductive health is essential in achieving the UK's international development objectives, in particular its ambitions for gender equality. Government investment must reflect that. I understand that the Minister knows this, but action, not just empty promises, is desperately needed. Women and girls being able to access their reproductive health rights also underpins the success of all three of the ambitions of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's women and girls strategy. Girls with access to education, safe and sensitive contraception and abortion services are less likely to drop out of school. Enabling women and girls to choose if and when they have children frees them to pursue employment and participate more fully in social and political life. Empowering women to make decisions about their SRHR is essential in tackling gender-based violence.

In its new report, the RCOG makes the case that if the UK Government are to be successful in achieving their key aims in the women and girls strategy, those aims must be matched with dedicated and sufficient long-term funding. Otherwise, it simply will not work.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Will the hon. Member give way?

Sarah Champion: I will, of course, give way to a former IDC member.

Dr Poulter: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. She is making a good speech, and I congratulate her on securing the debate. One area that the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has focused on in the past, and rightly so, is the high rates of maternal and new-born baby morbidity and mortality in many low and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa. Will the hon. Member address that point and make some suggestions to the Minister about how Britain can better support that agenda through its aid strategy and improve safety around pregnancy and childbirth?

Sarah Champion: I will indeed cover that, and also benign gynaecological conditions, which are another major killer for women. I congratulate the hon. Member on all his work on global health over the years. He continues to be an advocate in this place.

UK aid has contributed significantly and meaningfully towards ensuring that all women and girls can access their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and we should all be proud of that track record. RCOG members in Pakistan who had been providing training as part of the UK's women's integrated sexual health—WISH—programme reported dramatic increases in access to safe abortion care, post-abortion care and family planning by those who participated in their schemes. However, the decision to cut ODA threatens to stall or even reverse that progress around the world.

WISH is supposed to be the Government's flagship sexual and reproductive health programme, but even that is not safe from the cuts. MSI Reproductive Choices had its funding under the WISH programme slashed by 78%. My Committee has also heard that a three-year health programme for the most marginalised communities in Bangladesh received a £1.1 million cut to its £2 million budget two years in, with no notice whatsoever. A direct grant in Ghana, which was providing safe birth, child health and psychoeducation for pregnant women and mothers through building new maternal health self-help support groups and outreach clinics, received a 25% cut.

The Government are not putting their money where their mouth is. The most recent data shows that bilateral spending on SRHR decreased by more than 50% from £515 million in 2019 to £242 million in 2021. The Minister is aware that it is not good enough, and I am aware that he is trying to change it, so I look forward to hearing more about that in his remarks.

Estimates by the Guttmacher Institute suggest that the cuts could already have resulted in 9.5 million fewer women and girls having access to modern methods of contraception, 4.3 million more unintended pregnancies, 1.4 million more unsafe abortions and, as the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) said, a possible 8,000 more avoidable maternal deaths.

Countries with the greatest need for SRHR funding and programmes have been hit the hardest by the cuts, and within those countries, the most marginalised are often the most affected. Professor Friday Okonofua, an obstetrician and gynaecologist based in Benin City, Nigeria, said in RCOG report that it is the most

[Sarah Champion]

marginalised people who are reliant on donor-funded services. In Nigeria, where nearly 80% of health payments are out of pocket, the loss of funding from the UK Government has only widened this dire gap in services.

Making donations towards SRHR in humanitarian crises is welcome, but not enough. UK support must be in the form of sustained programming that delivers against the UK's commitments to the UN sustainable development goals, and promoting the health of women and girls must be the backbone of international development. As RCOG recommends, will the Minister commit to restoring funding for SRHR, and spend £500 million each year for the next three years on SRHR programming and supplies?

RCOG is calling on the Government not only to restore investment in SRHR, but to strengthen their global advocacy on SRHR by investing in new and existing global partnerships and collaborations. The UK's financial commitment to the Family Planning 2020 initiative had a significant impact on the global funding landscape for SRHR. It contributed to enabling an additional 24 million women and girls to access family planning services. I ask the Minister again to make a financial commitment to the Family Planning 2030 initiative, so that we can continue the programme's success.

Only by linking our national actions to global goals and commitments can we hope to achieve truly universal access to SRHR for every woman and girl. As well as being one of the largest donors of support for SRHR supplies, the UK has been one of the most progressive in its advocacy. RCOG is calling on the Government to strengthen their global advocacy on SRHR by championing stigmatised issues such as abortion care. That is something I care about deeply, particularly as abortion rights are being rolled back around the world. I was proud that the UK co-led a statement at the UN General Assembly last year on the importance of respecting the bodily autonomy and SRHR of women and girls. It has also been reassuring to see the UK Government commit to prioritising safe abortion care as part of their commitment to supporting SRHR in the women and girls strategy.

Mainstreaming safe abortion services and post-abortion care is essential to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality. Unsafe abortion remains one of the world's leading causes of maternal mortality. The risk of dying from an unsafe abortion is highest for women in Africa, where nearly half of all abortions happen in potentially dangerous circumstances. In his response, will the Minister say how the Government plan to champion safe abortion care in their programming, and in nations' universal healthcare plans, as part of an effort to strengthen health systems?

We have seen the success of telemedicine in early abortion care in the UK. Guidance from RCOG, the World Health Organisation and other authorities on clinical standards affirms that telemedicine is a safe and effective delivery model for expanding access to abortion care. RCOG has encouraged the FCDO to invest in telemedicine and in self-management of abortion in settings where that can offer safe additional pathways to increased access. As RCOG has suggested, I would like the UK Government to champion the prioritisation of women's and girls' gynaecological health needs on the global health agenda.

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate. Does she agree that the Government are right to commit to focusing spending on women and girls, and particularly on maternal mental health? Will she call for the UK to publish a voluntary national review on the sustainable development goals, given the importance of this subject?

Sarah Champion: I absolutely support what the hon. Lady says. She is a member of the International Development Committee, and the Chair of the International Development Sub-Committee on the work of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. She has always been a champion on these issues, and the Minister has heard what she said.

The FCDO's programming does not address the global burden of gynaecological disease as a priority in its own right, or as a key element of its integrated SRHR response. That is a glaring omission. Forthcoming RCOG research shows that overall morbidity for women and girls due to so-called benign gynaecological conditions outweighs—I was stunned when I heard this—the combined morbidity from malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS in low and middle-income countries; yet gynaecological conditions are not in the FCDO's strategy. There is an urgent need for the UK Government and donors around the world to afford gynaecological disease the same priority as maternal mortality and diseases such as malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS. Can the Minister look into that?

As a first step, RCOG and I are seeking a commitment from the UK Government to championing the issue by investing in the collection of data and research on the scale of the burden, so that we build strong evidence on which to base future investment. Investing in quality SRHR training for all healthcare workers should be a top priority. At present, the workforce meets only 41% of the needs of low-income countries. A lack of skilled workers is a major barrier to making universal health coverage a reality. I welcome the Government's commitment to strengthening the workforce as part of their contribution to that agenda, but as RCOG recommends, we need greater investment to support task-shifting and task-sharing between different groups and levels of healthcare workers. That is essential if we are to address shortages; support the delivery of comprehensive, integrated SRHR services, including expanded access to abortion care and long-acting reversible contraception; and support the diagnosis and treatment of gynaecological disease at the earliest stage.

The new report from RCOG is an important reminder to us all—and to the Minister—of our responsibility to women and girls around the world, who rely on our Government's support for their essential healthcare. It should also serve as a call to action, so that we resume the progress that is needed to achieve universal access to SRHR. I urge the Minister to seriously consider the report's recommendations for investment, as well as the points that I have raised today. We must stand together, alongside women and girls everywhere, and continue to advocate for their health, empowerment, and equality.

4.17 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): It is a tremendous pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and the first time that I have done so. This is

a subject that you and I have discussed many times over the last 10 or 15 years, so I know that you take a great interest in it.

My pleasure in appearing before you, Mr Davies, is exceeded only by my pleasure in responding to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), with whom I have had many interactions. As she knows well, I agree with a large amount of what she says, and never more so than in today's debate. I pay tribute to her for securing the debate, and for the work she does on the International Development Committee, together with its members. It is widely regarded as being among the most expert Committees in the Houses of Parliament. I look forward to giving evidence to her Committee in September, in its inquiry on the important matters that we are discussing. If I do not answer her points in sufficient detail, I know perfectly well that she will pursue me on them.

I also thank the hon. Lady for what she said about the work of British diplomatic missions overseas; I will pass on to the missions her generous words, which I know they will appreciate. As a result of the reduction in the ODA budget from 0.7% to 0.5%, incredibly difficult decisions had to be made, and that imposed an enormous strain on those who are now, but were not then, my officials. Many extraordinarily difficult decisions were made, in furthering the will of Parliament that the budget should be cut, but we are in a better position than we were. I hope that that will become clear next week when we report back to Parliament.

Every woman and girl should have control over her own body and her own life. She should be able to make informed decisions about sex, and whether and when to have children. She should have access to good-quality sexual and reproductive health services and be able to realise her rights. That is far from the case for too many women in too many countries, which is why universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights forms an important part of the British Government's approach to development and diplomacy. Our commitment to promoting those rights is set out in our strategies on international development, global health and women and girls, and is a central element of our approach to ending the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children.

We face many challenges in achieving our aims. Global progress on reducing maternal death rates had stagnated between 2016 and 2020, even before the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. That is why I am championing our efforts to help end the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030. The campaign joins up efforts right across the system, on issues including water, sanitation and hygiene, good nutrition, clean air, access to new health technologies, and a supportive environment for sexual and reproductive health and rights, which the hon. Member for Rotherham spoke about so clearly.

Let me turn to the worrying trends that are putting at risk the progress we have made on sexual and reproductive health and gender equality. Attempts to roll back the rights of women, girls and members of the LGBT+ community are increasingly well funded and well organised, and we are determined to confront them. Britain is a proud champion of these hard-won rights. We continue to promote and protect them around the world by working closely with our allies, including in the multilateral sphere. We must challenge the lies, polarisation and

division that are undermining that progress. That is why the UK led a landmark joint statement at the UN Third Committee last October. Along with 71 global partners, we committed to working tirelessly to advance gender equality, and to supporting the rights of all women and girls. At this year's Women Deliver conference in Kigali, the UK will help to catalyse united action against the roll-back of women and girls' rights, and action to further gender equality. There is much to do, but there is cause for hope and the UK has a key role to play.

I turn to another challenge that we face, which is the reduced domestic Government funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights across the world, which was prompted by the covid pandemic and crises around the world. The UK's official development assistance has also reduced. It remains the Government's policy that we will get overseas spending back to 0.7% when the economy allows, but meanwhile we are doing as much as we can to find multipliers that can enhance and augment our taxpayers' money. We have set out a strong pathway towards that through our strategies on women and girls and on ending preventable deaths.

We remain a key supporter of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and we have a significant portfolio of programmes and policies. For example, through FP2030—the global family planning partnership—the UK is helping partners around the world to advocate for better access to family planning. The global financing facility supports stronger, more sustainable access to health systems. The women's integrated sexual health programme has enabled more than 9.5 million women and girls in Africa and Asia to use modern methods of contraception, and the UK remains a world leader in efforts to end the AIDS epidemic, including through our health system strengthening work, our work to end preventable deaths, and support for the World Health Organisation and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. We are pushing for equitable access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, dismantling barriers to access, targeting underserved groups and championing SRHR for all.

Sarah Champion: On FP2030 and the women's integrated sexual health programme, can the Minister talk about the financial commitments that go alongside the commitment to leading on policy?

Mr Mitchell: I can certainly say to the hon. Lady that we will do everything we can. As she set out in her speech, this is a very high priority for the Government, and we will do everything we can to make sure that those efforts are adequately resourced.

The Foreign Office and other donors have to adapt our approaches to ensure that the work can be financed sustainably. That means placing accountable country leadership and investment at the heart of our development agenda. For example, the UK has provided more than £200 million to the UNFPA supplies partnership since 2019 to improve the availability, quality and supply of life-saving reproductive health products. That covers family planning, safe abortion, about which the hon. Lady spoke extremely eloquently, and maternal health medicines. Over the last two years, the UNFPA supplies partnership has successfully secured domestic financing commitments from 43 low and middle-income countries regarding their own reproductive health supplies, totalling \$26.4 million, and many committed for the first time.

[Mr Mitchell]

The final element of our approach is ensuring that our efforts on sexual and reproductive health are fully integrated into our broader work on strengthening health systems. That was set out in our G7 Health Ministers communiqué in May. We and the other member states have committed to universal access to comprehensive health services—which include maternal, sexual and reproductive health services—at every stage of life. In making that pledge, we recognise that those services are a vital part of achieving the UN sustainable development goals.

To conclude, we are acutely aware of the challenges that we face in advancing this work, many of which were set out so eloquently by the hon. Lady.

Sarah Champion: Will the Minister give way before he finishes?

Mr Mitchell: Yes. I am perorating rather than finishing, but of course I will give way.

Sarah Champion: I know the Minister well. If he cannot comment now, can he do some research when the RCOG report on benign gynaecological conditions comes out? I was genuinely shocked to discover that those conditions were killing more women than the other major diseases combined, and that we are not focused on that. I would be extremely grateful if the Minister made a commitment to look into that.

Mr Mitchell: I will certainly look into it. I was extremely struck by what the hon. Lady said about the scale of that issue, and by the comparison that she set out so clearly.

Despite the challenges, the UK continues to prioritise work on sexual and reproductive health and gender equality across the full span of our development and diplomatic work. That includes targeted support to reduce maternal mortality, determined efforts to reduce the roll-back of SRHR and women and girls' rights, and work to secure sustainable financing. We will continue to advocate for the world's most marginalised and underserved people so that we secure rights and choices for all.

When it comes to making progress on international development, Britain's aims cannot be understood unless they are seen through the eyes of girls and women, who suffer the extremes of poverty first and hardest. In putting girls and women at the forefront of everything that we do, a particular aim of the Government's is to get as many girls into school as we possibly can. As I told the House this morning, in the last five years for which figures are available, we were able to procure the education of more than 8 million girls.

We are also focusing on family planning; ensuring that women have the ability to decide for themselves whether and when they have children; and bearing down on all sexual violence against women, but particularly in the hideousness of conflict. Those three aspects of our policy drive us forward in what we believe is the critical battle of our times: the need to do something about the appalling discrepancies of opportunity and wealth that disfigure our world today.

Question put and agreed to.

Construction Workers: Pension Age

4.30 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the pension retirement age for construction workers.

It is pleasure to take part today, Mr Davies, and to see Members in attendance. I will open with a question: why does it always have to be the working class who suffer? The Work and Pensions Secretary says that Ministers will soon have to “grasp the nettle” to raise the state pension age to 68. It is working people who will bear the brunt of that, none more so than construction workers.

Last year, around 2.2 million people were working in construction across the UK, with 670,000—31%—aged between 50 and 64. In Scotland, around 160,000 people were working in construction, with 54,000 of that group aged between 50 and 64. It is estimated that around 100,000 people aged 65 and above are working in construction across the UK, with 4,000 of that age group working in Scotland.

Undoubtedly, those workers bring a huge wealth of experience and skills that they can pass on to future generations, but they face a pension black hole in many situations. Research by Unite has found that the majority of construction workers were not saving towards retirement. Estimates show that only 797,000 employees in the construction sector are paying into a pension.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing today's debate. The Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association has stated that there should be a single state pension age for all, but that flexibility should be introduced to allow people to receive their pensions earlier. Does he agree that the Government should support construction workers perhaps receiving their pension earlier, considering the physical toll that their occupation can have?

Owen Thompson: I agree entirely, and I will develop that point. Those 797,000 employees paying into a pension make up only 36% of the construction workforce. We are creating a destitute generation. Unite said:

“These figures are deeply troubling... Even if workers are saving towards a pension, there is no guarantee that they are saving sufficient amounts to prevent poverty in retirement. The way that construction is organised, with short-term engagements, rampant bogus self-employment and nefarious schemes such as umbrella companies, it is incredibly difficult for construction workers to have confidence in their continued employment so as to allow them to consistently pay into a pension scheme. The government needs to take urgent action to begin plugging this black hole in construction pension saving, the consequences of not doing so do not bare thinking about.”

The issue is clear. There is already a mental health crisis in the construction industry, and the pension black hole adds to the worries of workers. It is very much a male-dominated industry, and we know that men are three times more likely to die by suicide than the national average. Construction work has a variety of pressures, from tight contracts to long hours, time away from loved ones and managing budgets, not to mention the added stresses of the pandemic and now the rising costs of supplies.

The sector still has a macho culture that prevents many workers from seeking the help and support they might need, putting further stress on their mental health and wellbeing.

Margaret Ferrier: On the point about health, construction workers face certain occupational hazards such as exposure to asbestos, which can cause cancer and detrimentally affect their health later in life. Does the hon. Member agree that, due to the health risks to which construction workers are exposed, the Government should evaluate reducing their pension retirement age?

Owen Thompson: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. The key part of this is evaluation. Let us make sure that we have all the evidence to back up the calls that we are making. The issue has been looked at, so let us take on board the assessments and do something with them. We know that an early retirement age is possible in other industries. I thank and pay tribute to the Library for the excellent briefing that it has prepared to support this debate, which lists a number of other occupations in which early retirement is possible. Footballers are one example; I think their retirement age is something like 35.

Scotland has the lowest life expectancy of all the countries in the UK. In Midlothian, life expectancy at birth was 81 for women and 77 for men in the years 2019 to 2021. Meanwhile, men in Knightsbridge, London, have an average life expectancy of 94, the highest in the country—nearly 15 years longer than the average male.

Unlike other countries, the UK has no provision for early access to the state pension under any circumstances. That is a critical point. We must consider why we need to be so prescriptive when it comes to this particular topic. Proposals for early access to the state pension have been discussed previously, in the 2016-to-2017 and 2021-to-2023 state pension age reviews. The situation is unfortunate. The issue will not go away. The pressures around it will become significantly more challenging and eventually we will have to grasp the thistle and actually take action on it, so why not now?

Canada and the USA have general provision for early access to pensions in exchange for lower pension amounts, and that could be considered as part of this. The normal minimum pension age, which is the earliest age from which someone can normally draw their workplace personal pension, has gone from 50 to 57 by April 2028. Some people in certain professions with a lower retirement age—such as sportspeople, as I mentioned—who had a right before April 2006 to draw their pension before age 50, may have a protected pension age, further widening the gap. However, construction workers do not have that provision.

Last month, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), about the potential merits of lowering the state pension age for construction workers. She argued against reforming the current system, saying:

“The Government believes that the principle of having a State Pension age that is the same for everybody is fundamental in the UK. It has the merit of simplicity and clarity including giving a clear signal to those planning for retirement.”

So we are sacrificing a generation of workers for the sake of “simplicity”.

A recent survey by the Chartered Institute of Building again showed the scale of the problem. Many employees cannot afford to retire because of inadequate pension plans and because they have no alternative financial investments to support themselves. The organisation called for construction employees to be encouraged to consider retirement plans and to set aside a sufficient

amount to support themselves for possibly the next 20 to 30 years. However, in the face of a cost of living crisis, that has become even more challenging than it was. The CIOB said that clear information needed to be provided, with a focused campaign to help construction workers, and I support that call. However, I would go one step further and say that we need a full review into the issue of pensions and the construction industry.

In March, Baroness Neville-Rolfe said that builders, electricians, plumbers and manual labourers should be allowed to retire on a state pension earlier than office workers who had stayed on in further education. Her report said that the UK Government should look at changing the rules to allow manual workers to access their pension pot early. She recommended that those “who have performed physically demanding roles over many years” should be allowed to access their pension early, because they had a higher likelihood of developing health problems than other people, yet there has been nothing—no change and no impetus to help hard-working people. A full review would be the first step on the road to righting this wrong and the first step towards stopping an entire generation being flung on the financial scrapheap. After a lifetime of hard manual work, the ultimate ignominy for construction workers is to face poverty in their twilight years.

Construction workers literally built this country. We talk of levelling up and growing the economy, and, dare I say it, we have had a Government who talked about building hospitals—I do not know how many hospitals they eventually got to. None of that happens without construction workers. We need new homes, and that does not happen without construction workers. They deserve so much better, and this could be the starting point to achieving that.

4.40 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) mentioned, 2.2 million people work in construction, without whom there would be no offices, factories, roads, schools or homes. Although we place great value on having a roof over our heads, we undervalue the people who build them.

Margaret Ferrier: Following on from that, a concerning skills gap is growing in the UK construction sector, which means that existing employees have to work longer hours on site to compensate for that gap. Does the hon. Member agree that if the skills shortage is not addressed, many construction workers will experience fatigue and might be burdened with poor health and retirement outcomes?

Ronnie Cowan: I could not agree more. When I left school in the late 1970s, it was no longer fashionable to take on trades. Everybody had to go to college, no matter what the course was, and we lost the skillsets in my local shipyards and in construction for plumbers, joiners, platers, fitters and all those skills. If we look at the average age now—they are getting into their 50s—there has been a gap of sometimes 20 or 30 years before we have taken on new apprentices. We are taking on new apprentices now, but the experience that we lose when these older guys leave is immeasurable. So they are staying on later and later and working longer into what should be their retirement life, sometimes in very physical jobs in very difficult circumstances.

[*Ronnie Cowan*]

As we approach a general election, a lot of MPs will be asking themselves, “Should I stand again?” For many who, like me, are over 60, age will be a factor in making the decision. Nights like last night, when we were here until 8.30 in the evening walking round and round—I think it was 20 times—would make anyone reconsider their working life.

As for the physical aspect of construction work, I spent the weekend gardening. When I say gardening, I do not mean bedding plants and potting sheds; I mean using industrial petrol-driven machinery. Trees, bushes and grass all got the treatment. My green credentials might have taken a battering, but I can assure Members that the replanting of more appropriate species will take place in the near future. My point is that at 63, hard labour for me was a few hours interrupted by cups of tea, chocolate biscuits, a natter with the neighbours and much stroking of my beard as I perused the damage that, obviously, I was doing. My effort was minuscule compared with the contribution made day in, day out, year in, year out by construction workers and the effect that that has on their joints, muscles and tendons. Mine was minor compared with the toll that years of construction work results in.

When I was 17, I worked on building sites and spent the day carrying bricks, mixing cement and moving raw materials around for the skilled workforce to utilise. I cannot imagine what state my body would be in if I had done that job all my working life. And yet we ask those workers to work in freezing conditions during the winter and increasingly hot conditions in the summer. The job we do must have a bearing on the age we retire at.

On the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian by the UK Government, the UK Government believe that

“the principle of having a State Pension age that is the same for everybody is fundamental in the UK”

but I disagree. They say that it

“has the merit of simplicity and clarity including giving a clear signal to those planning for retirement”,

but what is that clear signal? Is it “Frankly, we don’t care”? Is it “Just be grateful you are not dead already”? Or is it “We don’t appreciate your hard work over all these years”? I suggest it is a combination of all three.

Finally, we have acknowledged that people in many professions can and do retire earlier already—that happens. It is time we extended that to the unsung heroes that are our construction workers.

4.44 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing today’s debate, and I thank him for his work in this important policy area. I also thank colleagues from across the House who have taken part in the debate. I will address a number of issues, including the wellbeing of construction workers, how they can take their pension early in some cases, the importance of support for people looking for work and, indeed, the state pension age.

I turn first to the wellbeing of construction workers and those in similar industries. I think it is fair to say—I hope we all agree—that construction is clearly a very

important industry. Despite improvements to health and safety, there are still significant risks to workers in the industry, and I believe that it is important for the Government to take action to protect workers and to reduce risks at work. As has been noted by the shadow Secretary of State for the future of work, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), we need a new deal for working people, and an incoming Labour Government will create the right and safe conditions for proper competition and growth.

I am pleased to support the need for safety, both as a shadow Minister and as a constituency MP. There is much more to do to improve safety at work, and further action should be taken in this important area. For example, I believe that there needs to be a review of health and safety at work to make sure that outdated legislation is fit for purpose—something that I think other Members may have implied but that was not commented on. I also believe that those who are not able to work should receive support. There needs to be welfare reform to help support more people to make the breakthrough into sustained employment and, indeed, to progress in work. Without action, we risk condemning a generation to a life on the margins.

Today, unemployment is up, with 1.3 million men and women unemployed. The number of people out of work due to sickness has risen to a record high of 2.5 million, and 760,000 young people are not in education, employment or training—all at a time when we have millions of vacancies in the labour market. That is why reform is so urgent. After 13 years of Conservative Governments, too many people are trapped on welfare, sadly going nowhere. It is an unforgivable waste of their potential. We need reform, and we need new thinking.

I want to talk about the state pension and to briefly recap on some of the changes to state pension age, because there has obviously been a lengthy discussion of aspects of the policy. From the 1940s until April 2010, the state pension age was 60 for women and 65 for men. Legislation to increase the state pension age was introduced in stages, with the Pensions Act 1995 including provisions to increase the state pension age for women aged between 60 and 65 in a series of stages between April 2010 and 2020, to bring it into line with the state pension age for men. The Pensions Act 2007 made provision to increase the SPA from 65 to 68 in stages between 2024 and 2046, and the Pensions Act 2011 brought forward the completion of the increase in the women’s SPA to 65 to November 2018.

As a result of those Acts, the current timetable is for the SPA to rise to 67 between 2026 and 2028, and to 68 between 2044 and 2046. The announcement that the Government are not going ahead with accelerating the state pension age rise is welcome. It is the right decision, but it is the clearest admission yet that a rising tide of poverty is dragging down life expectancy for so many. Life expectancy appears to be stalling and even going backwards in some of our poorest communities, as was hinted at by hon. Members who spoke earlier. I am afraid that that is a damning indictment of 13 years of failure under the current Government and, indeed, the coalition Government. I hope the Minister will acknowledge that later.

The hon. Member for Midlothian has called for the state pension to be available early for some construction workers, and I appreciate that he spoke about that today. As I said, I congratulate him on securing the debate.

However, I believe that the approach he suggests could lead to a series of unintended problems for the Department for Work and Pensions in administering the state pension. It is important to remember that other help is available, and I want to see the help and support improved. I would also like to make a broader point to him: it is very important that our pension system offers security and predictability for people of working age who are saving for a pension. I am grateful to him for securing today's debate, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the matters raised.

4.49 pm

The Minister for Employment (Guy Opperman): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing the debate and passionately putting forward his case. I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on the debris and disaster that he wreaked upon his garden last weekend—mighty will be the photographs, I am sure. It was also good to hear the points set out by my friend the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier).

It was good to hear from the shadow Pensions Minister, the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), who is also a friend of mine. I am no longer the Pensions Minister, because I was shuffled off that mortal coil by the previous Prime Minister, but I am standing in as a deputy today. I apologise on behalf of the actual Pensions Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), who has a long-standing engagement outside the House of Commons that has been pre-booked for a considerable time, so I notify the hon. Member for Midlothian that she means no discourtesy to him or the House by her absence. I will endeavour to be an able replacement for the Pensions Minister, but she is most definitely carrying forward the torch of the Department's policy on an ongoing basis.

This has been a debate about all matters construction, and it is right and proper that a full declaration of previous ability be made. I was a painter and decorator for the best part of nine months. I helped to build various buildings on labouring sites, just like the hon. Member for Midlothian, and I was briefly a roofer in my student days. "Opperman" means "upper man"—the man thrown up on the roof in days gone by to catch the tiles as they were thrown up there—so I come to this debate with great support for the construction industry. The hon. Gentleman was entirely right to laud, as others did, construction workers' contribution to society, whether that is in Scotland, in the United Kingdom or throughout the world. It is to our credit that we have a thriving industry.

The hon. Gentleman raises a legitimate, fair and fundamental point: whether someone is a construction worker or any other person doing a heavy, physical, manual job, how does the state provide for them on an ongoing basis as they age and reach the designated retirement age? With due respect, we have to bear in mind that at all stages there is the issue of intergenerational fairness, because all pensions—this point is not always grasped—are paid by the taxpayer of today, who has to make a contribution to satisfy the number of pensioners, which is going up massively.

Bluntly, we pay more in pensions than ever before in this country. The new state pension went up to £203.85, which is an increase of £18.70, in April 2023. The hon.

Gentleman will be aware that the benefit system was enhanced by over 10% in the Budget. We have never paid more in state pensions than we currently do.

Margaret Ferrier: Many construction workers are self-employed and will therefore have no private pension, or a limited one. Does the Minister agree that we should recognise that facet of the construction sector and look at how pension education can be improved in the sector?

Guy Opperman: As the person who pioneered Pension Awareness Day, which I can strongly recommend, and many other pension policies during my five years as the Pensions Minister, I strongly endorse the hon. Lady's point and encourage the sector unions to get involved in that. To be blunt, some were better than others. I had the honour and privilege of speaking twice at the Trades Union Congress annual conference; I think the first time was a legitimate invitation, but the second time I believe the invitation was probably just repeated by mistake. Making the case to union and sector colleagues for what we are trying to do is very important. I take the point.

The hon. Lady brings me nicely to the issue of which pensions are available. There are three types. There is the state pension, which obviously depends on the extent to which the individual pays national insurance contributions. Pretty much every employee in the construction sector will be paying national insurance contributions as part of their employment, and there is no question but that the self-employed should also be a part of that. The state pension should kick in in the usual way, so that will arrive at a particular time.

On top of that are the reforms brought in originally by the Labour Government, through the Turner commission, in 2003 and subsequently legislated for by the coalition in 2011-12 and expanded on by the coalition. I am referring to automatic enrolment. I accept that not everybody in the construction sector is in an employed job, but I will come to that point in a second. Automatic enrolment is an undoubted cross-party UK success story—I knew it was going well when the Pensions Minister from China requested a meeting to discuss how we were trying to get a workforce motivated and saving in a way that they could not necessarily do previously.

It was clear that the pensions system in the 1980s, the '90s and the noughties was declining in terms of the private contributions that we wished to see. The defined benefit system was declining and the defined contribution system needed to grow. Putting it to the individual was difficult—I will come in a second to the point that the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West made about the self-employed—but automatic enrolment has transformed private pension saving in this country. Saving 8% on an ongoing basis, as we are now doing, with a contribution from the employer within that and some support from the taxman, is massively helpful.

Let me give the stats. As of May 2023, we were almost at 11 million employees, having started in 2012. In 2012, the number of people who had a private pension was 42%; that has now gone up to 86%. Young people were at below 30%; they are now at 85%. Women were at just about 40%; they are now at 87%. The stat that I have for construction workers, which I am assured was provided by my predecessor but one, is that construction workers with private pensions have gone from 30% to 79%. Obviously, that is those who are in an employed situation,

[Guy Opperman]

but it clearly shows a dramatic improvement on the situation that would have applied if we had been having this conversation 11 years ago, prior to the introduction of automatic enrolment.

That does not mean that one should not address the points that have fairly been raised about the self-employed. Having done 20 years as a self-employed individual, let me make the point that if one is self-employed, one has the perfect right to sign up to one's own pension. One has the perfect right to join NEST, the National Employment Savings Trust, which is the easiest automatic enrolment provider. There are many different sectors that are relevant. I started out as a—much thinner—jockey and then became a lawyer. Construction workers can set up their own self-employed pension, which is of course tax-deductible as to earnings on an ongoing basis, and many in the construction industry take advantage of that.

However, I accept that there is a cohort that is not saving as it would like to, notwithstanding the three potential ways in which that happens. Along with a state pension that has increased, one has to be aware of the 2016 reforms, which were introduced by a previous Government and set out the new state pension, which was introduced to be simpler and better for a whole cohort of society. To be fair to the hon. Member for Midlothian, he set out the Pensions Minister's approach previously. This is in a context where there is the universality of the state pension, but more importantly, we have had this for 75 years, and the modern state pension has very clear rules—the hon. Gentleman set them out—about the time at which one can get entitlement. Those rules help to make it both affordable, because it is paid for by the working taxpayer, and sustainable, so that it can continue to be the foundation of income in retirement for future generations.

There is some evidence from some countries—I accept the hon. Gentleman's point—that one can have an earlier acceptance of part of one's pension in some cases, but there is a lesser sum. There is genuinely an issue with being careful what you wish for, though. The reason why the Cridland review and the Neville-Rolfe review are sceptical about this, as the hon. Gentleman set out, is that the state pension is there to provide a basic form of support in our old age, such that the state can then say, "We assess that this contribution of taxpayer funding—of GDP—is the amount that we will set aside to try to support those in difficulties by reason of their age, such that they are now pensioners."

On top of that, there is £30 billion-worth of housing support, there is pension credit support worth many thousands of pounds, and there are a huge number of other additional benefits, such as the winter fuel payment, which is going up by £300. The hon. Gentleman alluded to the fact that things like the cost of living are more complicated; he will be aware that we have spent £94 billion over the past couple of years to support the most vulnerable, including those on benefits, those in receipt of the state pension and particularly those in receipt of pension credit. That support is ongoing. The rises in winter fuel payments are a good example, with the extra £300 coming in plus the ongoing energy support grant.

It is clear that special arrangements for certain groups would rapidly lead to calls for similar arrangements for other groups. How can I put it delicately? I was not a very good jockey—I broke 26 bones in my body in my limited and short career, and my life expectancy and longevity as a jockey were highly limited—but I was able to transfer those skills, some would say interestingly, into being a lawyer and a Member of Parliament. But there are plenty of other professions that would then come forward, and that is a very significant issue for the state. It is worth having a proper conversation about this, because ultimately the state has to decide how much of a tax contribution should be taken from the working population to address these problems. There are inherent problems that would undermine a universal state pension age and its clarity.

Having worked in the Department for Work and Pensions for the past eight years, for my sins, I can strongly assure the hon. Member for Midlothian that the administration of the state pension is a marvel, but it is also incredibly complex. The moment that there were an introduction of a differential assessment, it would create a logistical conundrum, to say the least, and would require administration on an epic level. Getting such a thing correct—I suspect that as the hon. Gentleman proposes, all these things would have to be assessed, including with a prior medical assessment—is extraordinarily difficult. With respect, that approach was comprehensively rejected by the Cridland report. I accept that one paragraph of the Neville-Rolfe report seems to suggest that certain people do so; I think it talks about people who are 65 with 45 years of national insurance contributions. It is something that can be legislated for, because this Government or any future Government will have to legislate for the state pension situation in the next two years.¹ There is no doubt that we will have to return to the issue and produce legislation setting out on how these things can be done, and Parliament can make decisions on that.

I will make a couple of brief points that I think are relevant to how we approach people who have done one job but are struggling to continue in it. First, they would obviously rather be working than on welfare, but we have never paid more welfare support: this country has never given more to the disabled and to those on welfare support. There is a copious amount of support out there. On reskilling, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the Augar review, the lifelong learning pledge and the efforts that are being made to create further education not just for people aged 18 to 24, but for older workers, in a whole host of ways.

I will slightly push back on the hon. Member for Inverclyde, who was slightly disparaging on the skills situation. I believe that there have been about 5,454,000 apprenticeships since 2010. That is a pretty impressive record on apprenticeships, which have massively increased.

Ronnie Cowan: Will the Minister give way?

Guy Opperman: I will happily give way, but surely the hon. Gentleman must accept that that is a massive figure.

Ronnie Cowan: But the point I was making was that we picked that up after two or three decades of neglect. What we have been missing in between is the experience that people have gathered during that time.

1. [Official Report, 20 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 18MC.]

Guy Opperman: Normally I am very happy to have a go at the 13 years of Labour Governments, but I say respectfully that there was a trend by successive Governments throughout the years that university was the way ahead. That was particularly the case with the Blairite ambition that 50% of all students should be going to university. There is clearly a role for university, but I would like to think that the coalition Government and this Conservative Government have majored on apprenticeships. I urge the hon. Gentleman to read the debate I answered last night—I have been busy—because it was specifically about skills and further employment, with which we are trying to support people.

One way we are supporting people is through the midlife MOT, which is very relevant to the hon. Member for Midlothian. The midlife MOT is mentioned in the Cridland report—I think it is on page 72. It is set out in quite a lot of detail; it is a project that I have pioneered in copious detail for the last six and a half years. I cannot stress enough the difference it is making. The midlife MOT now exists in jobcentres for those who are unemployed; it exists on a private sector basis with the three trials that we have going; and pretty much every large pension provider is now running it. It looks at wealth, work and wellbeing. It is massively appropriate to reskilling those who are 45 to 55 and are struggling to work out the way ahead.

The evidence so far is that the midlife MOT is a very successful innovation. The private sector is very much in support of it. If the hon. Member for Midlothian and his union have not read the Aviva review, I urge them to do so. Put bluntly, the midlife MOT is part of the suite of options that the Government have, along with the business champion for older workers, who I have met repeatedly and is doing good work, and the support for returnerships, which the Chancellor set out in copious detail in the Budget. There are also opportunities for retraining, whether those are in sector-based work academies or in the skills bootcamps run through jobcentres up and down the country, whereby if an individual becomes unemployed they can be retrained in alternative employment so that they can return to the workforce.

In respect of those with health conditions and the disabled, the hon. Member for Midlothian will be aware of the health and disability review that has been published by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work. It looks at exactly how we get people with long-term health conditions and those who are disabled back into work.

Secondly, there is the unquestioned ability that has been shown by so many people. There are now 4.9 million people who are disabled but still working, as of the most recent figures from quarter 3 of 2022. That is an increase of 2 million people. It is a testament to this country that we are now much more open to taking

people with health conditions or disabilities into work. Again, that is something that I think will make a difference.

A couple of other points have been made. I have talked about the two state pension age reviews. I would also make the point that for those who are struggling and vulnerable, there has been £94 billion-worth of support.

In conclusion, I believe it is right to restate the point that for 75 years the state pension has had a single issue and receipt date. That will continue for the near future, but Parliament will decide those matters on an ongoing basis with whoever the Government are in future. In those circumstances, I commend this speech to the House.

5.8 pm

Owen Thompson: I thank the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) and my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), as well as the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), and the Minister, for taking part in the debate, but I have to say that I am disappointed in the responses from the shadow Minister and the Minister.

I think perhaps we are coming to the issue with different perspectives. The Opposition and the Government's point of view is "This is what it would cost," whereas mine is "Let's put the health and wellbeing of the individual first, and then we can work out the other bits." I am not saying that one is better than the other, but they are different ways of looking at the issue. I agree with the Minister that there is a conversation that still needs to be had. Is the approach of simply asking the price tag enough to decide whether we should or should not do something? Just because something is difficult, that does not mean that we should not do it.

I hear the Minister's point about auto-enrolment. However, I gently suggest that a high volume of people signed up with a private pension does not automatically mean that they are going to have enough to support them in retirement. There is more still to be done. I welcome the start of the conversation, but it needs to continue. We need to change the mindset on the issue and move away from simply saying, "This is what it costs, so we can't do it." Let us look at it in a more rounded way and make it about the wellbeing of the individual.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the pension retirement age for construction workers.

5.10 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 12 July 2023

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Sudan: Sanctions on Entities Linked to SAF and RSF

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): On 12 July, in response to the ongoing conflict in Sudan, the UK announced a package of six sanctions under the Sudan (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020. We are freezing the assets of three commercial entities linked to each party involved in the conflict: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), headed by Al Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), headed by Hemedti.

The SAF and RSF have dragged Sudan into a wholly unjustified war, which they are prosecuting with utter disregard for their people, and for which they should be accountable. UK sanctions on those entities which the SAF and RSF have used to finance their war effort are designed with a specific purpose: to press the parties to engage in sustained and meaningful progress to peace—including stepping aside from power—allow in humanitarian assistance, and end atrocities.

Both the SAF and the RSF own and control vast commercial empires which provide them with economic resources and weapons so they can keep fighting. We have imposed six asset freezes on commercial entities in total, three operating under the authority of each party.

Acting with partners including the US, which designated four of the same entities on 1 June, the sanctions will send a strong message of international condemnation to both parties to the conflict,

As there is a humanitarian exemption in our Sudan sanctions regulations, exempting funds destined for humanitarian aid from an asset freeze, we do not anticipate that the sanctions will impact humanitarian assistance in the region. We will monitor this closely.

The full list of designations is as follows:

Al-Junaid, large RSF-owned conglomerate set up by Hemedti which made him the richest man in Sudan. Provides financial backing for the militia, enabling it to continue the conflict.

GSK Advance Company Ltd—a key front company owned by RSF funding the militia and enabling it to purchase material.

Tradive General Trading co—a company associated with the RSF, supplying it with funds and matériel such as vehicles retrofitted with machine guns for the RSF to patrol the streets.

Defense Industries Systems (DIS)—the large SAF-owned conglomerate, which provides the finances for Al Burhan to continue fighting.

Sudan Master Technology—a Sudanese company involved in the sale of arms with close commercial ties to Defense Industries System, the economic and manufacturing arm of the SAF which supplies it with funds and equipment.

Zadna International Company for Investment Limited—a subsidiary of SAF-owned DIS, reported to be one of its top three “major earners”.

[HCWS931]

EDUCATION

Early Years

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Claire Coutinho): From 4 July 2022 to 16 September 2022, the Department for Education (DFE) consulted on the following proposed amendments to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework:

a change to the current statutory minimum staff to child ratios in England for two-year-olds from 1:4 to 1:5;

clarifying that childminders can care for more than the currently-specified maximum of three young children, when caring for siblings of children they already care for, or when caring for their own child; and

clarifying that “adequate supervision” while children are eating means that children must be within sight and hearing of an adult—rather than the current wording of “sight or hearing”.

Alongside the consultation, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and Frontier Economics—commissioned by DFE—conducted a study with early years providers to assess the impact of the proposed changes.

In the Government response to the consultation, published in March 2023, we announced that we would be proceeding with the proposed changes to ratios, childminder flexibilities and supervision while eating.

Today, 12 July 2023, we have laid a Statutory Instrument (SI) in both Houses to amend the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework (EYFS) to make the changes referenced above. These changes will come into force from 4 September 2023.

The updated version of the EYFS—which will apply from 4 September 2023—is available on www.gov.uk, alongside the current version of the EYFS—which still applies until 4 September 2023.

A full impact assessment has been prepared for these regulations. It is annexed to the explanatory memorandum, which is available alongside the SI on the OPSI website <https://www.legislation.gov.uk>.

In the written ministerial statement published on 7 July we also announced additional funding to uplift the rates for the existing entitlements from September 2023. We will be investing £204 million of additional funding in 2023-24 and £288 million in 2024-25. For 2023-24, this means we will effectively increase the funding rates that local authorities receive by an average of 32% for the current two-year-old entitlement, and by an average of 6.3% for three and four-year-old entitlements, compared to their current 2023-24 rates. Further detail can be found in that statement.

[HCWS932]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Strengthening Environmental Civil Sanctions

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): Protecting our natural environment is a Government priority. The Government are pleased to announce today that we have laid new secondary legislation to strengthen environmental civil sanctions and provide the environmental regulators with the tools they need to hold operators to account.

Currently, there is a cap of £250,000 on variable monetary penalties imposed by the environmental regulators for a wide range of offences. We are removing this cap to make the penalty unlimited, so that penalties are proportionate to the degree of environmental harm and culpability. Strong safeguards are in place, including the ability of an offender to pay, when regulators determine the size of penalties. The Environment Agency will use the independent Sentencing Council guidelines to underpin all penalties.

Strengthening regulations that ensure polluters will be held to account is part of our wider plan to reduce pollution and protect the biodiversity and ecology of our natural environment. All funding from fines and penalties handed out to water companies that pollute our rivers and seas will be invested in schemes that benefit our natural environment.

We know that people across the country want to see more progress in tackling pollution and, if operators breach regulations, our environmental regulators need the right powers to impose penalties. These new penalty changes will deter organisations from polluting and increase their incentive to comply with environmental regulations.

We are also introducing unlimited variable monetary penalties as a civil sanction for offences under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016, to ensure regulators have the right tools to drive compliance across a range of sectors and breaches.

This announcement follows our recent consultation, first announced in “Plan for Water”, on strengthening the enforcement regime where the overwhelming majority of responses from the public supported our proposals. These changes complement a suite of Government action under way to better hold water companies to account, including new powers for Ofwat that will enable it to take enforcement action against water companies that do not link dividend payments to performance for both customers and the environment. More details can be found in the attached annex.

Together, these changes will provide a proportionate deterrent and punishment for operators who breach their permits and will help regulators to better protect the environment.

The civil sanction regime for environmental offences should act as a clear deterrent to offenders across all industries, from water companies to waste operators—we will not let companies get away with illegal activity and where breaches are found we will not hesitate to hold companies to account.

Annex 1

As set out in the Government’s “Plan for Water”, we are driving action to strengthen regulation and drive improvements across the water sector, including:

More investment

The £2.2 billion of accelerated investment by water companies, to spend on new infrastructure to tackle pollution and increase our water resilience—including £1.7 billion on storm overflow improvements to cut discharges by 10,000 per year.

Creating a new water restoration fund, using money from water company fines and penalties to support local environmental projects.

Delivering long-term catchment action plans—community-led schemes which aim to improve waterways and surrounding eco-systems—to improve water bodies in England.

More than doubling the money for slurry infrastructure by increasing funding to £34 million for farmers to improve slurry storage, reducing a major source of water pollution. Supporting farmers to store more water on their land through the £10 million Water Management Grant to fund more on-farm reservoirs and better irrigation equipment.

Stronger regulation

Consulting on banning the sale of plastic wet wipes.

Enabling key water supply infrastructure—such as reservoirs and water transfer schemes—to be built more quickly.

Bringing forward the deadline for water companies to reduce chemicals in wastewater treatment to 2027.

Consulting on extending environmental permits to cover dairy and intensive beef farms, and to improve how this is done for pig and poultry farms, in order to better manage sources of pollution.

Tougher enforcement

Enabling Ofwat to link dividends to company performance, and tightening up measures on “water bosses” bonuses.

Ofwat has also announced measures to penalise companies that fail to properly monitor storm overflows and determined that in the financial year 2023-34, the water sector must return £132 million to customers as a result of underperformance.

[HCWS929]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust: Independent Review

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): Following a request by the Department of Health and Social Care, in May 2022, NHS England commissioned an independent review into concerns raised about compliance with coronial processes at North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust. Today, NHS England published the findings from this review.

I am grateful to Dame Marianne Griffiths for chairing this review and for the work she and her team have undertaken into investigating this important issue. The review was tasked with examining patient safety and governance processes at the trust which included consideration of previous investigations and reports on this matter. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to this review—the families and the staff—whose participation will enable lessons to be learnt.

The review found that significant leadership, cultural and behaviour issues contributed to the overall failings experienced by the families. For example, appropriate documentation was not provided to HM Coroners and, when submitted as part of the coronial process, documents had been amended to downgrade a serious incident into an event needing lesser scrutiny. This review makes 18 recommendations which cover governance, leadership, culture, and commissioning. The report has been published on NHS England’s website and is available here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/north-east-yorkshire/our-work/publications/ind-investigation-reports/>

In the last decade, the Government have introduced substantial measures to reduce harm to patients, including a statutory duty of candour, legal protections for whistle-blowers, medical examiners across the NHS and legislation to establish the Health Services Safety Investigations Body. It is important that the right processes are put in place by trusts to make sure safeguards are properly implemented and there is continuous learning.

NHS England has also introduced a patient safety strategy which sets out how the NHS will support staff and providers to share safety insight and empower people—patients and staff—with the skills, confidence and mechanisms to improve safety. I also welcome the National Guardian Office’s review, published in February, into speaking up in ambulance trusts to ensure that ambulance services are a safe place to work, and staff feel confident and supported when issues need to be raised. Action includes the NHS launching an independent review into broader cultural issues in ambulance trusts.

Ambulance services are receiving £200 million of additional funding this year to grow capacity and improve response times, alongside 800 new ambulances, including specialist mental health ambulances. We have also made significant investment in the ambulance workforce, with the number of NHS ambulance staff and support staff increasing by over 40% since 2010.

Alongside the review report, the trust has issued an assurance statement and I am pleased that both the trust and the integrated care board have accepted the findings and recommendations and have set out some of the work already in train to address the concerns.

I will continue to work with the trust and NHS England to address the concerns raised in Dame Marianne’s review and ensure that lessons are learnt to improve patient safety across the wider healthcare system.

A copy of the report will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS933]

WORK AND PENSIONS

National Disability Strategy

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Tom Pursglove): In January 2022, the High Court declared that the National Disability Strategy was unlawful. This was because the UK Disability Survey, which was used to inform it, was held to be a voluntary consultation

that failed to comply with the legal requirements—“Gunning Principles”—on public consultations. The Government were granted permission to appeal this judgment and the appeal hearing was held on Wednesday 28 June 2023. The Court of Appeal handed down its judgment at 11 am yesterday, 11 July 2023.

I am pleased to inform the House that the Court of Appeal found in favour of the Government. This means that both the UK Disability Survey and the National Disability Strategy have now been found to be lawful by the Court of Appeal, and we are able to continue with the important work of implementing this long-term strategy to transform disabled people’s everyday lives for the better.

We need to take stock of what this decision means for individual National Disability Strategy commitments and evaluate how best to move forward. I will provide a further update in September to set out our next steps in more detail.

The Government will also continue to move forward with our planned consultation on the Disability Action Plan over the summer. The Disability Action Plan and the National Disability Strategy were always intended to be complementary, with the former focusing on concrete, short-term actions deliverable in 2023-24 to improve disabled people’s lives, and the latter setting out our longer-term vision, and I am delighted that we are now able to make progress on both of them.

I have consistently heard from disabled people themselves, and from disability stakeholders, that they want to see action on the important commitments set out in the National Disability Strategy. I am pleased that we are now able to move forward again with this ambitious agenda, and I look forward to working with colleagues across the House to drive joined-up, effective action across Government, which will truly transform disabled people’s lives for the better.

[HCWS930]

Petition

Wednesday 12 July 2023

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Planned closure of the Bank of Scotland's Pollokshields Branch

The petition of residents of Glasgow Central,

Declares that the proposed closure of the Pollokshields Branch of Scotland in Glasgow will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy; notes that this closure would negatively affect the large elderly population in the area, alongside those from ethnic minority backgrounds who prefer to transact in cash and deal with people they know; further notes that Albert Drive has been hit by two serious fires in recent years, and the Bank was an anchor holding footfall to the rest of the street.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government and the Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of this branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Alison Thewliss, *Official Report*, 20 June 2023; Vol. 734, c. 767.]

[P002839]

Observations from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Griffith):

I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for submitting the petition on behalf of her constituents regarding the closure of the Bank of Scotland's Pollokshields branch.

I am sorry to hear of your constituents' disappointment at the planned closure of the branch. The facts reveal that the way consumers interact with their banking is changing. In 2021, 86% of UK consumers used a form of remote banking, such as an app, online or on the phone, up from 68% in 2017. Indeed, according to the Bank of Scotland, 83% of the customers of the Glasgow Pollokshields branch also used other Bank of Scotland branches, internet banking or telephone banking.

As with other banking service providers, Bank of Scotland will need to balance customer interests, market competition, and other commercial factors when considering its branch strategy. Although the Government understand the dissatisfaction felt by the hon. Member's constituents, decisions on opening and closing branches are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis.

I hope that you can appreciate that it would therefore be inappropriate for the Government to intervene in these decisions. The Government cannot reverse the changes in the market and in customer behaviour; nor can they determine firms' commercial strategies in response to those changes. Having the flexibility to respond to changes in the market is what makes the UK's financial services sector one of the most competitive and productive in the world, and the Government want to protect that.

Having a dynamic and competitive financial services sector drives innovation and incentivises banks and building societies to keep developing their banking products and services, creating better outcomes for customers.

Nonetheless, the Government firmly believe that the impact of branch closures should be understood, considered, and mitigated where possible so that all customers, wherever they live, continue to have appropriate access to banking services.

As the hon. Member may know, guidance from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to reduce their physical branches or the number of free-to-use ATMs. Firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of a planned closure on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs and consider possible alternative access arrangements. This is to ensure that the implementation of closure decisions is done in a way that treats customers fairly. The guidance has recently been strengthened to enhance protections for consumers that rely on branch services. The FCA is closely monitoring banks and building societies in this regard and if a firm falls short in its provision of reasonable alternatives, the FCA can and will ask for closures to be paused or for other options to be put in place.

In the customer information pack that Bank of Scotland has published for the Pollokshields' branch closure, customers are pointed to the free-to-use ATMs at the nearby Day Today, 0.1 miles away; Friends Convenience Store, 0.38 miles away; and Sainsbury's, 0.42 miles away. They are also pointed to alternative Bank of Scotland branches on Victoria Road, 0.83 miles away, and Shawlands, 1.3 miles away. These branches are both accessible from the closing bank branch via public transport.

Alternative options to access everyday banking services can be via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows 99% of personal banking and 95% of business customers to deposit cheques, check their balance and withdraw and deposit cash at 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK. The nearest Post Office branch to the Glasgow Pollokshields Bank of Scotland branch is in Crosshill, 1 mile away.

In recognition that cash continues to be used by millions of people across the UK, the Government have legislated through the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 to establish a new legislative framework to protect access to cash. The Act establishes the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) as the lead regulator for access to cash and provides it with responsibility and powers to seek to ensure reasonable provision of cash withdrawal and deposit facilities. As part of this responsibility, the FCA must also seek to ensure that there is reasonable provision of free withdrawal and deposit facilities in relation to personal current accounts from relevant providers.

In the context of the Government's legislation, the financial services sector is working together to develop and provide shared cash access services. This includes a process for LINK—which operates the UK's largest ATM network—to assess a community's access to cash needs. These assessments take place in the event of the closure of a core cash service or a request to LINK directly from a local community. As part of the assessment process, LINK takes into account relevant information such as the size of the population, number of shops, demographic data and the nearest alternative services. In circumstances where LINK considers that a community requires additional cash services, participating firms

within the financial services sector will provide a suitable shared solution, such as an ATM, deposit service, or shared banking hub, for cash users in that community. While the Government understand that LINK has not recommended an alternative cash service as a result of Bank of Scotland's plans to close its Pollokshields branch, petitioners may wish to contact LINK for

further information. Contact details can be found on LINK'S website: www.link.co.uk/consumers/request-access-to-cash/

I hope that the hon. Member finds this response useful and that she will pass on my thanks to her constituents for bringing this to my attention.

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 12 July 2023

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

NHS Long-term Workforce Plan

The following is an extract from the statement on the NHS long-term workforce plan on 3 July 2023:

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): We have a superb new accident and emergency in Scunthorpe, and we are pressing ahead with plans for a large, state-of-the-art community diagnostic centre. I have lived locally all my life, and those are some of the most significant upgrades we have seen in a generation. But there are things to do—we certainly need more NHS dentists. Would the Secretary of State consider a tie-in so that newly qualified dentists spend a minimum percentage of their time delivering NHS care?

Steve Barclay: I am pleased to see those services going into Scunthorpe. That underscores the investment we are making now while preparing for the long term, through the largest ever expansion in workforce training in the NHS's history. My hon. Friend is right about the importance of tie-ins. Let me explain why that matters in particular for dentists: around two thirds of dentists do not go on to do NHS work. That is why the plan has looked at tie-ins for dentistry, which we will explore in the weeks and months ahead.

[Official Report, 3 July 2023, Vol. 735, c. 580.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay):

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft).

The correct response should have been:

Steve Barclay: I am pleased to see those services going into Scunthorpe. That underscores the investment we are making now while preparing for the long term,

through the largest ever expansion in workforce training in the NHS's history. My hon. Friend is right about the importance of tie-ins. Let me explain why that matters in particular for dentists: around **one third of dentists do not do NHS work**. That is why the plan has looked at tie-ins for dentistry, which we will explore in the weeks and months ahead.

Topical Questions

The following is an extract from Health and Social Care topical questions on 11 July 2023.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Back to NHS dentistry, I am afraid. Later this week, the Select Committee will publish its report on NHS dentistry services. Spoiler alert: it will be uncomfortable reading for some. Will the Secretary of State tell us when and how he plans to bring forward plans for the tie-in of newly qualified dentists? Could that go hand in hand with a “return to the NHS” campaign for dentists who have already left that part of the service?

Steve Barclay: It is characteristically astute of my hon. Friend to zero in on the tie-in, which is an important part of the long-term workforce plan. Around two thirds of dentists do not go into NHS work after training, so having a tie-in is more pertinent there than it might be elsewhere in the NHS workforce.

[Official Report, 11 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 174.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay):

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine).

The correct response should have been:

Steve Barclay: It is characteristically astute of my hon. Friend to zero in on the tie-in, which is an important part of the long-term workforce plan. Around **one third of dentists do not do NHS work**, so having a tie-in is more pertinent there than it might be elsewhere in the NHS workforce.

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**not later than
Wednesday 19 July 2023**

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