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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 7 October 2024

HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 9 JULY 2024]

THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 754

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2024-2025

House of Commons

Monday 7 October 2024

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to questions, I am pleased to inform the House that the Reverend Mark Birch has been appointed Speaker's Chaplain and Canon of Westminster Abbey—he will formally take up that post on 7 November.

Mark has been a minor canon at Westminster Abbey since January 2015. He was made a member of the Royal Victorian Order in March 2023 for his part in organising the funeral of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. He played a central role in rehearsals and preparations for the coronation of Their Majesties the King and Queen. He has a wealth of experience: before he joined the abbey, he served as a chaplain in a variety of settings—schools, universities and hospices—as well as serving as a parish priest. I know that he will be an effective, engaging and supportive presence for the parliamentary community, and I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in welcoming Mark to his new post.

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Winter Fuel Payment

1. **Ben Obese-Jecty** (Huntingdon) (Con): What estimate she has made of the number of pensioners in poverty who will not be entitled to the winter fuel payment in winter 2024-25. [900491]

18. **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What estimate she has made of the number of pensioners in poverty who will not be entitled to the winter fuel payment in winter 2024-25. [900508]

24. **Gregory Stafford** (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): What estimate she has made of the number of pensioners in poverty who will not be entitled to the winter fuel payment in winter 2024-25. [900514]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall): May I say briefly, Mr Speaker, that as my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister has said, 7 October last year was the deadliest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust, and we stand firm in our commitment to bring the remaining hostages home and secure the immediate ceasefire and aid that civilians in Gaza and Lebanon desperately need.

An estimated 880,000 of the poorest pensioners are not claiming the pension credit they are entitled to, so they do not get the winter fuel payment or pension credit of up to £3,900 a year. That is why we have launched the biggest ever drive to increase pension credit uptake and ensure that the poorest pensioners get the support they deserve.

Ben Obese-Jecty: Having spent the run-up to the election scaring pensioners into voting for them by claiming it was the Conservative Government who were a threat to their wellbeing, some of our poorest pensioners will now be forced to find out how difficult it is to keep warm huddled around Labour's gaslight. Given that the Government's own equality analysis states that only 100,000 of the 880,000 pensioners who are eligible for pension credit are expected to apply for it, if all those who are eligible do apply, how much more will that cost compared with the initial saving from removing the winter fuel payment?

Liz Kendall: I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that upon coming into government, we discovered that 880,000 pensioners are not claiming the pension credit they are entitled to. Given that his former Government failed to

take action to deal with that issue, I suggest that instead of making that point, he works with his council to increase pension credit uptake and looks at the £1.8 million we have given to Peterborough council to make sure that all the help for pensioners, including on winter fuel, is made available.

Wendy Morton: I remain deeply concerned about the pensioners in my constituency who will not be entitled to the winter fuel payment this winter—we are now into October. Given that we now know that just 14% of pensioners in absolute poverty receive pension credit, how can the Minister justify her Government's claim that they are focusing support on those in the greatest need?

Liz Kendall: Again, I say to the right hon. Lady that the reason so many of the poorest pensioners are missing out is that her Government failed to increase pension credit uptake. We have launched the biggest ever programme to increase uptake of pension credit. For the first time, we will be writing to all pensioners on housing benefit, and I urge the right hon. Lady to work with her local council and others to make sure that the poorest in her constituency get the money they are entitled to.

Gregory Stafford: Over 18,000 people in my constituency will lose the winter fuel payment, but this is not about figures; it is about individuals, which is why I am running a pensioners advisory service on Friday to help them with this issue. This is about people, so what does the Secretary of State say to people such as Rita in my constituency, who is looking after her husband who has multiple sclerosis and who will not be eligible for pension credit and therefore the winter fuel payment?

Liz Kendall: I know that the hon. Gentleman has focused over many years on health and healthcare issues, and I would say to him that we are in this situation because his Government left a £22 billion black hole in the public finances. Unlike Conservative Members, we take our responsibilities seriously, and I would urge him to work with his councils—they have received £7.1 million in Hampshire and £5.3 million in Surrey from the household support fund—to make sure that all pensioners get the money they are entitled to.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome the work that my right hon. Friend is doing in ensuring that the uptake of pension credit is increased, but there are genuine concerns about people who are just above that threshold who will remain in poverty—just under a quarter of a million in the north-west alone. In addition to the fantastic commitment there has been through the household support fund, will my right hon. Friend be undertaking any other mitigations to ensure that those pensioners living in poverty, particularly disabled pensioners, will not fall foul of this?

Liz Kendall: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and I welcome her to her position as Chair of the Select Committee. Alongside our work to increase pension credit uptake, the household support fund is available for those just above the pension credit level. My own

council has done a lot of work to make sure that pensioners just above that level can get extra help with the costs of heating or energy debt. There is also the warm home discount, which is available not just to those on pension credit, but again to those just above that level if they are on low incomes and have high housing costs.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her ambition to sign people up to pension credit, but we know that about 780,000 people will not sign up in time and also that there are 1 million people in fuel poverty above that mark. Given that we are really worried now, as winter is approaching, about the impact that this is going to have, particularly on the health of older people, will she look at the work done by Energy Systems Catapult and NHS Gloucestershire on social prescribing to ensure that people can receive energy payments in that way?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. This is not just about urging people to come forward and claim. We are writing to pensioners on housing benefit for the first time ever, and I am determined to bring forward the merger of housing benefit and pension credit, which the former Government delayed for years. I very much agree about the need to bring together social prescribing with help from the household support fund and other areas to make sure pensioners get all the help they need, and about the need to work with frontline NHS staff, as we are also doing, to make sure that the poorest who may be stuck at home with chronic conditions also know what they are entitled to.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): It is clear that one of the drivers of pensioner poverty is the sheer number of pensioners eligible for pension credit who have been left not claiming it for successive years by the previous Government. I welcome the Secretary of State's zeal for making sure that we put that right, but how can we as Members from across the House work with her Department to make sure that there are no unnecessary barriers for those who are eligible and in need of pension credit to claiming it this winter?

Liz Kendall: I would urge all hon. Members in this House to work with their local councils, as I am doing, to make sure that those on housing benefit and other pensioners know what they are entitled to, and to make sure that their councils know that the household support fund—the £421 million we have set aside this year, despite all the problems we face—is also available to those pensioners just above the pension credit level.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): In the general election, the Labour party promised that it had no plans to means-test the winter fuel allowance, yet we learn that millions of pensioners are to be affected. Indeed, in 2017 the right hon. Lady's party produced an analysis suggesting that around 4,000 pensioners would die prematurely were this policy to be brought into effect. Does she stand by that figure of around 4,000? If not, how many premature deaths does she believe will occur as a result of this policy?

Liz Kendall: In 2017, the right hon. Gentleman's party manifesto promised to means-test winter fuel payments. Until Conservative Members know that they have to apologise to the British people for the 200,000 extra pensioners in poverty over the past 14 years, and for a £22 billion black hole in the public finances, which we are now putting right but that has put the public finances at risk, they will remain on the Opposition Benches and we will remain on the Government Benches.

Mel Stride: I think I need to correct the right hon. Lady: there were actually 200,000 fewer pensioners in absolute poverty under the previous Conservative Government. She quite rightly is pressing the uptake of pension credit, but if all those who are eligible for it take it up, that will cost £3.8 billion, which is substantially more than the saving that is scored at £1.4 billion. If she is successful in her aspiration, the costs will substantially outweigh the savings; if she is not successful, potentially millions of pensioners will be plunged further into poverty. May I ask her which it is?

Liz Kendall: There are 200,000 more pensioners in poverty, and I am happy to put those figures into the public domain to set the record straight. The savings we have put forward take into account the increase in uptake that we foresee. Unlike Conservative Members, we are determined and will do everything possible—they should perhaps ask themselves why they first announced the merger of pension credit and housing benefit in 2012 and then put it off until 2028—to change things and get people the money they are entitled to. We will bring that forward to ensure that all the poorest pensioners get what they are entitled to.

Mr Speaker: I call Liberal Democrat spokesperson Steve Darling.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): There are 2.7 million pensioners over the age of 80 who would have benefited from the £300 winter fuel allowance. They are among the most vulnerable in our society. The right hon. Lady is right to say that the previous Government let them down, but let us not add insult to injury and have the new Government let them down. Can she reassure the House that she will reverse the regressive approach that she has taken to the winter fuel allowance, and not hit the most vulnerable people who are over 80?

Liz Kendall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He will know that this was not a decision that we wanted or expected to make. The reason we have taken it is that we have to deal with the £22 billion black hole in the public finances left by Conservative Members. But in doing so, we will as a progressive party always prioritise the very poorest pensioners. That is why we are so determined to end a situation where up to 880,000 people miss out on the winter fuel allowance because they are not getting pension credit. We are determined to put that right.

Access to Work Programme

2. **Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** What steps she is taking to reduce the time taken for Access to Work claims to be processed. [900492]

The Minister for Employment (Alison McGovern): I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Labour's manifesto said that we will tackle the backlog of Access to Work claims, and we will. We have improved the process and increased the number of staff processing claims, but there is more to do and that work is ongoing.

Johanna Baxter: Does the Minister agree that delays to the processing of Access to Work claims not only impact the individual and their health, particularly their mental health, but impact their ability to fulfil their potential and contribute to our economy? What further steps will she take to ensure that the process for helping disabled people back into work is reformed, to ensure that it is genuinely one of support that allows people to fulfil their potential and enables businesses to thrive?

Alison McGovern: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Disabled people have the right to work like everybody else. We have an ambition to see an 80% employment rate in this country, and we cannot do that without the contribution of people with disabilities. We are working on an employment White Paper and developing our policies, and we want everybody in this country to make their full contribution, especially disabled people.

Child Maintenance Service

3. **Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD):** What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service in collecting payments. [900493]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): The Child Maintenance Service is committed to ensuring that separated parents support their children financially and to taking robust enforcement action against those who do not do so. Between March 2023 and March this year, the percentage of parents paying something towards maintenance through collect and pay increased from 65% to 69%. This Government recognise that child maintenance payments play a crucial role in keeping hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty each year, and we are determined to do all we can to increase those collection levels further.

Mr Forster: Given that around half of children in separated families—that is 1.8 million children—are receiving no support from their non-residential parent, does the Minister know when that figure might change?

Andrew Western: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about those families who receive no support. I am told that the figure is actually around 40%, but none the less it is not good enough. Although there are varied reasons for that—indeed, there are some parents who do not want an arrangement—we are looking, as he may be aware, at a recently concluded consultation on the future of the Child Maintenance Service. We will consider our next steps with a view to trying to increase collection levels wherever we can.

Mr Speaker: Members have to stand to be called. I am not a mind reader; I am pretty good, but I cannot win the lottery.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): Two constituents have contacted me with separate but similar cases relating to obtaining child maintenance payments from abusive ex-partners. In both cases, their abusers have been able to use features of the system to avoid paying their fair share to their victims and their children, leaving my constituents with a shortfall of thousands of pounds. Can my hon. Friend tell me what steps are being taken to reform the child maintenance system to protect victims of abuse, such as my constituents?

Andrew Western: The Department takes domestic abuse extremely seriously. My hon. Friend will be keen to hear that the recently concluded consultation I referenced in my previous answer looked to address some of the issues with the direct pay service. Indeed, it consulted on the potential removal of that service moving forward. That service has been open to abuse and has led to victims of domestic abuse continuing to be terrorised. That is unacceptable, and we will look to address it moving forward.

Winter Fuel Payment: Medical Conditions

4. **Bradley Thomas** (Bromsgrove) (Con): If she will make an assessment of the potential impact of means-testing for winter fuel payment on people with medical conditions that are exacerbated by cold weather. [900494]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Emma Reynolds): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. Pensioners with a long-term health condition or disability may be eligible for disability-related benefits, such as disability living allowance or attendance allowance, and these benefits also provide for an additional amount in pension credit for those on low incomes.

Bradley Thomas: The Government's impersonal approach is cold comfort to thousands of disabled pensioners, including Ann in my constituency. She has to boil water to prevent infection and uses an electric nebuliser, and as a result she has high energy usage to protect her health. Can the Minister tell Ann what sacrifices she should make to protect her health this winter?

Emma Reynolds: This is a decision that we neither wanted nor expected to make, but when we came into office there was a £22 billion black hole in the public finances. There are mitigations in place. We have extended the household support fund and the hon. Gentleman's council will receive an extra £3.9 million. We are increasing the state pension. Through the triple lock, the state pension will increase by £1,700 in this Parliament. We will also deliver the warm home discount scheme, and I hope he will join me in making sure that every pensioner who is eligible for pension credit receives it, which will passport them to the winter fuel payment.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): We know that 2 million older people currently live in poverty in this country, with millions more with incomes just above the poverty level. Does the Minister agree that the Government should set up a pensioner taskforce to look at how pensioner poverty can be tackled once and for all?

Emma Reynolds: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I will meet him and any other Members of this House who have concerns on this matter.

Pension Credit

6. **Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure pensioners who are eligible for but have not previously claimed pension credit receive a winter fuel payment in winter 2024-25. [900496]

8. **Paul Davies** (Colne Valley) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help increase uptake of pension credit. [900498]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Emma Reynolds): We have been running a national campaign since September across a range of channels, including print and broadcast media, to encourage pensioners to check their eligibility and make a claim, and we will continue to work with external partners, local authorities and devolved Governments to boost the take-up of pension credit.

Blake Stephenson: Around 93% of pensioners in Mid Bedfordshire face losing the winter fuel payment this year; some of them earn less than £1,000 a month. What further support will the Minister give them to fill Labour's black hole in their household finances so that they can keep warm this winter?

Emma Reynolds: The winter fuel payment was once described as the

"largest benefit paid to pensioners...regardless of need, giving money to wealthier pensioners when working people on lower incomes do not get similar support."

Those are not my words, but the words of the Tories' 2017 manifesto.

Paul Davies: Claiming pension credit can provide pensioners with additional help for housing costs, council tax and heating bills. We all have a duty to boost pension credit uptake to ensure that low-income pensioners in all our constituencies receive the necessary support. I welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister and the Work and Pensions Secretary collaborating with local authorities and charities for the annual pension credit week of action, which took place during recess. What more can be done to ensure that low-income pensioners receive pension credit?

Emma Reynolds: We were pleased to see 160 local authorities respond positively to our call for action. They are working with us to drive the boost in uptake of pension credit. Apart from the national campaign that we have been running, we will bring together the administration of housing benefit and pension credit in a way that the former Government failed to do.

Women's State Pension Age: Compensation

7. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What progress she has made on responding to recommendations on compensation made by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman in his report on changes to women's state pension age. [900497]

23. **Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): What her Department's timetable is for responding to the recommendations on compensation made by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman in his report on changes to women's state pension age. [900513]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Emma Reynolds): I was the first Minister for eight long years to meet Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigners to hear their experiences directly. However, we do need time to carefully consider the ombudsman's report and evidence before we can outline our approach.

Mohammad Yasin: I have long supported women in Bedford born in the 1950s who have been failed by the DWP. We must do right by the WASPI women, some of whom are struggling to make ends meet. Will the Minister tell them today when the Government will respond to the report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which recommended a compensation scheme?

Emma Reynolds: The ombudsman's report is a serious report that took six years to complete and deserves serious consideration. We are carefully reviewing the details of that complex report and will come to a conclusion in the round.

Adrian Ramsay: I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) on this serious injustice, which is being compounded by the lack of swift action for redress. It really matters to all our constituents, including mine in Norfolk and Suffolk, where I have spoken to the local WASPI women group, which highlighted just how a big an impact it is having, including on women born in the 1950s who are struggling to make ends meet. Will the Minister please set out the timescale by which she will respond to the report and the action that will be taken?

Emma Reynolds: The ombudsman took six years to look into what is a serious, significant and complex set of cases. We need time to look at that seriously, and we are doing precisely that.

Vulnerable People: Support into Work

9. **Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to support vulnerable people into work. [900499]

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): We are committed to supporting vulnerable customers into work. At jobcentres, for example, we can identify the support needed and signpost people to courses or organisations to help them overcome barriers. We will be saying more about our proposals in the forthcoming employment White Paper.

Dame Meg Hillier: In my local jobcentre on Mare Street in my constituency, there is an extremely good team of DWP staff who work closely with vulnerable constituents to help them overcome the hurdles to getting benefits and getting into work. However, for people with fluctuating conditions, and particularly mental health conditions, there are many barriers both for them and for prospective employers. I wonder whether the Minister could give us a taster of what might be in

the White Paper in terms of support for employers in particular to encourage them to take on people with such challenges.

Sir Stephen Timms: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's positive report of the work in her local jobcentre. She highlights a major challenge behind a significant proportion of increased inactivity over the past few years. We will set out our response in the "Getting Britain Working" White Paper, but we are already providing tailored support in partnership with NHS talking therapies and individual placement and support in primary care. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is a good deal more to be done.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): Conservative-run East Sussex county council is threatening to close the Steps to Work programme, as well as Linden Court in Eastbourne, which supports people with learning disabilities to work towards employment. Will the Minister urge the county council to halt its plans and to consider alternatives such as selling off council buildings to raise the funds needed to provide these essential services for people with learning disabilities?

Sir Stephen Timms: The hon. Gentleman draws my attention to a concerning development. My view is that we need more support for people with learning disabilities to get into work, not less. If he sends me the details of the concerns he has raised, I will be happy to look into them further.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): The well-received and groundbreaking Buckland review of autism employment focused on the action needed to help to tackle the lack of opportunities and outdated recruitment practices that do not meet the employment needs of autistic people. How is the Minister—I welcome him to his place—going to use this review, which I seem to remember him welcoming, to tackle the lack of understanding and ongoing stereotypes to help to make real change via Access to Work and other DWP interventions?

Sir Stephen Timms: I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome. I am looking forward to a meeting with Sir Robert later on this month, and we will be talking exactly about that matter.

Mims Davies: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. The disability action plan mid-year update is now somewhat overdue. Can the Minister confirm to the House when there will be a much-needed update? In helping vulnerable people to thrive in all walks of life, whether in employment or in respect of equality of opportunity, will the Minister's Government commit, like the previous Conservative Government did, to working towards hosting the 2031 Special Olympics?

Sir Stephen Timms: We will be saying more and we will provide an update in the forthcoming "Getting Britain Working" White Paper. If the hon. Lady would like to drop me a line about the Special Olympics, I would be happy to look into that as well.

Jobcentre Access: Rural Areas

10. **Stuart Anderson** (South Shropshire) (Con): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of the accessibility of jobcentres to people living in rural areas. [900500]

The Minister for Employment (Alison McGovern): We need jobcentres to be better everywhere, including those in rural areas with unique challenges. In the autumn we will publish a White Paper on our plans to transform the employment support system, which will change jobcentres. I welcome input on that issue from Members from all parts of the House.

Stuart Anderson: In South Shropshire, youth unemployment has risen over the past month. What is the Minister going to do to stop this worrying trend in rural communities like mine?

Alison McGovern: I thank the hon. Member for bringing that point to the House; it is a major focus of the work that is currently going into the White Paper. We have had very worrying developments for young people since the pandemic, and we need to do much better to give them the best possible start in life. I will say it again: on this issue we welcome input from Members on all sides of the House.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): Housing associations are the second largest investor in employment support in the UK, second only to the Department for Work and Pensions. Their work invests in employment support for some of the hardest-to-reach communities, including rural communities such as mine in Suffolk Coastal. Will the Minister commit to working with housing associations to co-design and co-invest employment support over this Parliament?

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend again for her very welcome point. Housing associations are extremely important for connecting with residents, who often have multiple vulnerabilities. When thinking about the journey into work we need joined up services between the NHS, the local authority and our housing associations. They will be a part of the future partnership, and I look forward to working with her for her constituency.

Jobcentre Plus

11. **Patrick Hurley** (Southport) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus in helping people get back into work. [900501]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): To be frank, the current system is focused on the problems of yesterday. In the last Parliament, economic inactivity increased and the employment rate fell. We are planning fundamental reforms to the system that will focus on the problems of today and get more people into work, details of which will be set out in our forthcoming White Paper, "Get Britain Working".

Patrick Hurley: Will the Minister set out how the proposed merger between Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service will help to tackle economic inactivity and change the way that jobcentres work with their customers?

Andrew Western: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; I was pleased to hear that one of his earliest visits as the first ever Labour Member for Southport was to his local jobcentre with the Minister for Employment, who I know would want me to commend all the staff at the Southport jobcentre. The truth is that, at present, jobcentres seem to function more as places from which benefits are administered than as centres supporting people into work. The merger of Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service will address that, enabling us to get more people into employment and help those on low pay increase their earnings, through more personalised and localised support, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The challenge that jobcentres in Kendal and the rest of Cumbria face, as well as getting people back into work, is the fact that our workforce in Westmorland is far too small. The average house price in our constituency is 12 times average earnings, and waiting lists for social housing are through the roof. Some 66% of all employers surveyed in our community recently said that they were working below capacity because they could not find enough staff, so if we want to tackle the problem in our economy, we need to do two things: first, increase the amount of social housing and secondly, allow more flexible visa arrangements. Would the Minister's Department work with housing colleagues to provide more housing grants for our community and sign up to the youth mobility visa arrangements?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should know better. He gets in a lot, so he should not take advantage of other Members.

Andrew Western: The hon. Member will be pleased to know that we intend to work considerably more flexibly to support the needs of communities in a varied and bespoke way. He has particular challenges because of the rural nature of his constituency and various other factors, but he will appreciate that I will not make housing or Home Office policy on the hoof from the Dispatch Box.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Jobcentres are extremely good, as we just heard from the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), who is leaving the Chamber. Yet the new Minister for Employment previously described jobcentres as places nobody wants to go, and claimed that they do not offer real help. Our jobcentres help to ensure that almost 4 million more people have work, compared with when her party left office in 2010. More than 2 million of those employed are women. Will the Minister and the DWP team who have made disparaging remarks apologise to work coaches and DWP staff, who she and they have rubbished but who now have to look up to them as the new ministerial team?

Andrew Western: I fear that the hon. Lady has misunderstood the criticism, which is levied not at our outstanding work coaches but at the policies of the previous Government, who have left us with economic inactivity at its highest rate in years. We are the only G7 economy with a lower employment rate than before the pandemic. Those are the challenges that we have been left with, and the problems that we will solve.

Jobcentre Claimants: Travel Costs

12. Josh Newbury (Cannock Chase) (Lab): What guidance her Department has issued to private contractors working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus on reimbursing claimants' travel costs. [900502]

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): Provider guidance, which is published on gov.uk, makes clear that contractors on all our employment programmes must reimburse customers' reasonable travel costs.

Josh Newbury: I thank the Minister for that response. My constituent Connor is in a predicament: he is out of pocket for taxi fares to weekly or even twice weekly sessions with a Jobcentre Plus private contractor. Connor told me that the sessions last barely 15 minutes and are not helping him to reach his goal of becoming a mechanical engineering apprentice. Will the Minister review the value of Jobcentre Plus private contracts to both jobseekers and taxpayers?

Sir Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Performance is reviewed regularly and there are customer satisfaction surveys, but unlike the previous Government, this Government want to publish performance data so that everybody can see what is going on.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for his response. I think everyone wishes for claimants to be able to get job opportunities without finding themselves in a financial mess due to having to pay out for travel costs when they should be reimbursed. This is a big issue in my constituency in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister help directly those constituents who have been accordingly disadvantaged?

Sir Stephen Timms: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am not familiar with the arrangements in Northern Ireland, but certainly in the rest of the UK it is very clear that contractors ideally need to pay up-front, buy tickets and give them to the jobseeker before they embark on their journey, or, if not, reimburse them very quickly on production of a receipt.

Child Poverty Taskforce

13. Torsten Bell (Swansea West) (Lab): What steps is she taking to progress the work of the child poverty taskforce. [900503]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall): Tackling child poverty is a top priority for the new Government, and a personal priority for me. Children cannot fulfil their potential without food in their belly or a decent roof over their head, and we cannot fulfil our potential as a country when the talents of so many are left behind. That is why our new child poverty taskforce will drive action across every area of government to drive up family income, drive down family costs and give every child the best start in life.

Torsten Bell: I welcome the establishment of the child poverty taskforce. How will the taskforce ensure that lessons, including on the role of housing costs in driving up relative poverty and the necessity of growth to drive

down absolute poverty, will be learnt from previous attempts to drive down child poverty in Wales and across the UK?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about learning the lessons from the last time we were in government and lifted more than 600,000 children out of poverty, and looking at similarities and differences, not least that there are more children growing up in poverty in households, whether in the private rented sector or in social housing, and that there are more children growing up poor in a household where somebody works. Getting and creating more good quality jobs, and helping families into those jobs, is absolutely a crucial part of our child poverty plan.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Yet we have a situation where families with more children are impacted by the two-child cap and the benefit cap, and the Government are refusing to get rid of those things. At a stroke, they could lift thousands of children out of poverty and improve, overnight, their life chances. I appreciate the fact that the Government have the child poverty taskforce, but that is not making a difference to these children today, is it?

Liz Kendall: I am under no illusion about the impact 14 years of the Conservatives and the social security system has had on child poverty. That is why we are determined to take action across government to increase family incomes, drive down costs and, crucially, put in place long-term support, particularly in the early years. We will produce the strategy by spring. I am absolutely sure that every part of the plan will lift more children out of poverty.

Child Poverty

14. Luke Akehurst (North Durham) (Lab): What assessment she has made of trends in the level of child poverty in the last 10 years. [900504]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall): The last Labour Government lifted 600,000 children out of poverty. Under the Conservatives, the number went up by 700,000. There are now more than 4 million children living in poverty in the UK in the 21st century. In one of the richest countries in the world, that is a complete disgrace. That is why the work of the child poverty taskforce, which I co-chair with the Education Secretary, is so urgent and so important.

Luke Akehurst: Almost a third of children in the north-east live in poverty. The problem is particularly acute in the region. Will the Secretary of State work with our Mayor of the North East, Kim McGuinness, on her excellent regional plans to reduce child poverty?

Liz Kendall: Yes, we have already met Kim McGuinness, on 19 September, when she set out the actions she is already taking. Let me say to Members on both sides of the House that our strategy will be out in the spring, but we will not be waiting until then to act. Nationally, we have put £421 million into the household support fund to help the poorest families, and mayors such as Kim McGuinness are doing amazing work: they are working with schools to ensure that people claim the benefits to

which they are entitled, and, crucially, working with businesses to help them to do all that they can to tackle in-work poverty and ensure that working families receive the money for those children.

Carer's Allowance Overpayments

15. **Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): What steps she is taking to tackle carer's allowance overpayments. [900505]

16. **Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to tackle carer's allowance overpayments. [900506]

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): The work of unpaid carers is vital and often heroic, and we are determined to give them the support that they need. We are currently looking at options for tackling the problem of overpayments, including the possible introduction of a text message alert service.

Alison Hume: Carers make incredible sacrifices to care for loved ones, but they can be left deep in debt as a result of repaying the allowance after unintentionally breaching the qualifying rules. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we, as a society, have a duty of care to carers, and can he say more about the progress that the Government are making in overhauling carer's allowance and addressing the earnings cliff edge?

Sir Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I agree that we need to support carers properly. We want to get to the bottom of what has gone wrong with these overpayments and why so many people have been caught out. We have been piloting the introduction of a text message service, as I have mentioned, which has involved texting 3,500 claimants to alert them when His Majesty's Revenue and Customs informs the DWP that they have breached the current earnings limit. We are currently looking at the results, and if they are positive, that will be the first step towards addressing the overpayments problem. We will need to do more, but it will be a good first step.

Anna Dixon: There are nearly 1,200 recipients of carer's allowance in Shipley. The current earnings limit leaves people vulnerable to accidentally accruing overpayments if they become ineligible for the allowance, and it also acts as a disincentive, deterring people from working as much as they would like to. Will the Government consider raising the earnings limit?

Sir Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend has written to me about this matter, and I welcome her commitment to making progress. In an excellent piece of work, the former Work and Pensions Committee made a number of recommendations on the earnings rules, and once the new Committee is in place, we shall respond to the former Committee's proposals.

Robin Swann (South Antrim) (UUP): The Minister has referred to the army of carers that we have across the country, but we also have an army of unpaid carers who are being deterred from applying for carer's allowance because of concerns about the financial implications. Can the Government reassure those who have not yet come forward that they will be supported properly?

Sir Stephen Timms: I very much hope that we can, because the hon. Gentleman is right: there is a good deal of anxiety about these overpayment problems. We hope that the alert service will at least inform people when they run into a problem so that they do not then develop a large overpayment, which has happened all too often in the past, but we also need to look at the other arrangements relating to carer's allowance in order to provide the reassurance for which the hon. Gentleman has rightly called.

Benefit Sanctions

17. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What assessment she has made of trends in the number of benefit sanctions in the last five years. [900507]

The Minister for Employment (Alison McGovern): In May 2019 the universal credit sanction rate was 3.17%. It reduced considerably during the pandemic, gradually returning to 3.51% by November 2021. It then continued to rise, reaching a peak of 7.29% in October 2023, but it is now falling, with a rate of 6.17% in May 2024.

Dr Huq: According to recent research by Gingerbread, a high percentage of sanctions have been misapplied to single parents, not because they have not met the job search requirements but because of missed meetings for reasons connected with childcare. Max, a bereaved single dad of two, had his sanction overturned, which involved a fairly challenging process. Will my hon. Friend please look into the possibility of overhauling the mess of a system that was left behind by that lot over there?

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and, through her, I would like to thank Gingerbread for its work on this issue. There have always been, and always will be, conditions attached to social security, but the past 14 years show what happens when we have a Government who are more interested in blaming people and creating cheap headlines than offering real help. In our manifesto, Labour committed to review universal credit so that it makes work pay and tackles poverty, and the report that Gingerbread has written will also help inform our child poverty taskforce.

Topical Questions

T1. [900526] **Chris Webb** (Blackpool South) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall): I am determined to put transparency at the heart of the DWP, so I have today published 31 reports that were sat on by the previous Government—something that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability has long campaigned for. Under this Government's leadership, the DWP will be honest about the problems that the country faces and focused on the solutions needed to help people build a better life. That starts with our forthcoming White Paper, to get Britain working again.

Chris Webb: I first joined WASPI women—Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—in their welcome campaigning activity back in 2017. Seven years later, they are still fighting for justice. Can the Minister

assure women in my constituency and across the country that she will act urgently, unlike the previous Government, and bring this injustice to an end?

Liz Kendall: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I met representatives of the WASPI campaign before this Government were elected. My hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions was the first Minister to meet them in eight years. It really is a serious report that requires serious consideration. We will do everything possible to get this issue resolved as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): On 10 September, two days before recess, I led a debate in this Chamber, secured by the Conservative party, on the winter fuel allowance. The right hon. Lady spoke just now about transparency, but there was no equality impact assessment made available for that debate. Indeed, on 30 August, by way of a written question, my hon. Friend the Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) established that the Government had no intention of publishing that particular report. Yet on 13 September—two days after the debate and the vote, and one day after Parliament had risen—the report was made available. It was clearly, in my opinion, deliberately withheld. Does the right hon. Lady agree?

Liz Kendall: That is not true. The Conservative Government did not even allow the Office for Budget Responsibility to do an analysis of Liz Truss's disastrous mini-Budget and sat on 31 publications that, under their own rules, should have been published. We published an equality analysis. The right hon. Gentleman will know that that was never done for secondary legislation when he was in government, but this Government will be open and transparent, which is what we are already doing.

T5. [900530] **Paul Davies** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Since the election, numerous constituents have contacted me to raise concerns about the Child Maintenance Service's inefficiency in collecting arrears payments. Can the Minister outline the measures being taken to enhance the service's effectiveness in this area?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): My hon. Friend is entirely right to raise this issue. He will be pleased to know that this Government are looking to utilise new powers to obtain a liability order without recourse to the courts, reducing the time taken to secure such an order from 22 weeks to around six.

Mr Speaker: We come to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): Mr Speaker, may I draw your attention to a report recently published by the University of Bath, which highlights that benefit claimants face a series of cliff edges if they claim additional funds? If a family earn just £7,399, they lose the ability to claim free school meals. What plans does the Minister have to tackle the lack of compassion in the system?

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): I am not familiar with the report to which the hon. Member refers, but we committed in our manifesto to reviewing universal credit, nearly 15 years after it was first launched. The cliff edge issue and others will be among those that we will want to look at in the course of that review.

T6. [900531] **Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): After 14 years of Tory economic chaos and 17 years of Scottish National party public service failure, as many as one in four children in my constituency now live in poverty. Last year the Scottish Children's Commissioner said that the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, had "absolutely" failed young people in Scotland. Does the Secretary of State agree that tackling child poverty will be a crucial part of the work of this Labour Government? As part of the important work that she is doing with the taskforce to develop a new child poverty strategy, will she come to my constituency—

Mr Speaker: Order. These are topical questions, so please can we keep them short? I have to try and get through the list to help others.

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend has raised these issues with me before, and I will absolutely meet children, families and child poverty organisations from her constituency. We aim to visit every region and every devolved nation as part of that strategy, and I look forward to meeting her and her constituents then.

T2. [900527] **Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Data from Marie Curie suggests that 90,000 people die in poverty every year, many of them after a terminal diagnosis. Even with the help of the special rules system, there have been reports of terminally ill people facing mounds of red tape when trying to claim benefits. Is the Minister satisfied that the current 12-month limit on special rules is sufficient, and has she assessed how the current administrative burden on terminally ill people claiming benefits can be reduced?

Liz Kendall: The hon. Lady raises an extremely important question, which I have discussed with a hospice and other organisations such as Marie Curie and Sue Ryder in my own constituency. I want to look at how the system can be made to work as quickly and swiftly as possible, particularly for people at this very difficult time in life, and I would be happy for the Social Security Minister and my office to contact her directly to get more information.

T7. [900532] **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Research by Sense has found that none of the computers in jobcentres across Britain are equipped with specialist assistive technology, and it has estimated that it would cost £5 million to ensure that every jobcentre had that specialist assistive technology. Will the Minister commit to introducing a jobcentre assistive technology fund in order to aid disabled people in their quest to look for work?

The Minister for Employment (Alison McGovern): My hon. Friend is an absolute expert on this kind of inclusive change that we need to make to our employment

support system so that we can help everybody, and I look forward to working with her on ideas just like that when we bring forward our White Paper in the autumn.

T3. [900528] **Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): Members of the AEAT pension scheme have collectively lost millions of pounds from their pensions, despite being told that they would be no less favourable following the privatisation of their pension scheme in 1996. The Public Accounts Committee found that they had received inadequate information from the Government and lost money as a result. Will the Minister provide a clear timescale for redress for AEAT pensioners in this unique case, as promised by a previous Pensions Minister?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Emma Reynolds): I thank the hon. Member for his question. I have looked into this issue, which has a long and complex history, and I would be very willing to meet him to discuss it in more detail.

T8. [900533] **Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): The Secretary of State has today published 31 research papers commissioned but hidden by the previous Government, which among other things provide valuable insight into the experience of disabled people applying for personal independence payments in order to live and work independently. Why does the Minister think the last Government chose not to publish these findings?

Sir Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend asks an extremely good question. The policy of the previous Government was to publish all such commissioned research reports within 12 weeks of receiving them. That policy was complied with until 2018, when Ministers stopped complying with it, so we have had to publish all these reports today. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement is a vital first step in rebuilding the trust in the Department that was so shattered by the culture of secrecy, obfuscation and cover-up by Conservative Ministers.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): In response to several hon. Members, Ministers have spoken about the complexity of the ombudsman's report on the WASPI campaign. While appreciating that, may I ask for a statement in principle that the Government will eventually offer significant compensation to the WASPI women?

Emma Reynolds: As I said previously, the ombudsman took six years to consider this complex case. We are looking into it very seriously, but I cannot make any announcements today. The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait for our announcement on this issue.

T9. [900534] **Mr Alex Barros-Curtis** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Government's proposed youth guarantee will help to ensure that young people are either learning or earning. Of course, the young person's guarantee is already a key commitment of the Labour-run Welsh Government. Can the Minister assure me and my Cardiff West constituents that this Government will learn from the work being done in Wales?

Alison McGovern: I assure my hon. Friend that we will work with the Welsh Government, Welsh local authorities and all our colleagues across the United Kingdom to get the policy right for young people, who I believe have been failed over recent years. It is about time they had the future they deserve.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): With employers in Witham and across the country about to be whacked with a barrage of higher taxes, thanks to this Government, how do the Government expect employment levels to stay high? How do they expect small businesses to be at the heart of any employment strategy that they claim to have?

Liz Kendall: Under the previous Government, we had the highest taxes in 70 years, and jobcentres to which only one in six employers ever went to recruit. We will transform our jobcentres into a new jobs and careers service, so that people get the help they need, and so that employers can recruit the staff they desperately need.

T10. [900535] **Markus Campbell-Savours** (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): I welcome the Government's proposed fraud Bill. Can the Minister explain how it will claw back money from people who cheat the system, while also protecting privacy?

Andrew Western: I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the proposed fraud Bill. The level of fraud in the welfare system is absolutely unacceptable; almost £10 billion was lost last year. Increased use of data will be essential to clamping down on both capital fraud and broader fraud. However, we will do that without sharing any information at all with banks and financial institutions.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her personal commitment to transparency. Further to the question asked by the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride), will she share with the House how many thousands of people will die as a result of Labour's choice to cut the winter fuel payment?

Liz Kendall: I am very happy to share the data: there are 200,000 more pensioners living in poverty after 14 years of Conservative government. I am also very happy to publish information showing a 152% increase in pension credit claims, thanks to the big, bold campaign run by this Labour Government.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents want a fair and robust welfare system, but they have no truck with fraud. Can the Secretary of State assure my constituents that she is doing everything she can to crack down on fraud, and to make sure that those who genuinely need help get it?

Andrew Western: My hon. Friend is correct to raise this issue. As I said, we will not tolerate the current levels of fraud in our welfare system. He will be pleased to note the Prime Minister's recent announcement of the forthcoming fraud, error and debt Bill, which will begin the necessary work to drive down fraud in the Department.

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): Can I share with the Secretary of State the plight of my constituent, who went without child maintenance payments for six months? That happened not because of anything done wrong by her, or the paying parent, or the paying parent's employer, which processed the direct deduction of earnings order, but because the Child Maintenance

Service misplaced the payments. Will the Secretary of State apologise for that mishap? What plans does she have to rectify that deeply flawed organisation?

Andrew Western: I am very sorry to hear of this case. I am not familiar with it, but I will look into it, if the hon. Gentleman contacts me with the details.

Anniversary of 7 October Attacks: Middle East

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Prime Minister, I am sure that the House will wish to reflect for a moment on the fact that this is a solemn day. It marks the first anniversary of the terrorist attack on Israel. Dozens of hostages are still in captivity, and the conflict has claimed thousands of innocent civilian lives. Today we should come together to remember all those who have been affected. I call the Prime Minister.

3.35 pm

The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer): Today we mark a year since the horrific attack on Israel by the terrorists of Hamas. It was the bloodiest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust—a day of sorrow, a day of grief. Over 1,000 people were massacred, with hundreds taken hostage, in an attack born of hatred, targeted not just at individuals, but at Jewish communities, at their way of life and at the state of Israel—the symbol of Jewish security to the world. Fifteen British citizens were brutally slain that day. Another has since died in captivity. Our thoughts today are with the Jewish people around the world, the Jewish community here in the United Kingdom, and all those we lost a year ago.

For so many, the pain and horror of that day is as acute today as it was a year ago. They live it every day. Last week I met the families of British hostages and those killed on 7 October. I sat with them as they told me about their loved ones. I will never forget their words. Mandy Damari spoke of her love for her daughter Emily. She said:

“my personal clock stopped at 10:24 on the 7th of October”,

the moment when Emily sent a desperate, unfinished message as Hamas attacked her kibbutz. She is still held captive today. We can hardly imagine what hostages like Emily are going through, or what the families are going through—the agony day after day. So I say again: the hostages must be returned immediately and unconditionally. They will always be uppermost in our minds. I pay tribute again to the families for their incredible dignity and determination.

Today is also a day of grief for the wider region, as we look back on a year of conflict and suffering. The human toll among innocent civilians in Gaza is truly devastating. Over 41,000 Palestinians have been killed, tens of thousands orphaned and almost 2 million displaced, facing disease, starvation and desperation without proper healthcare or shelter. It is a living nightmare and it must end. We stand with all innocent victims in Israel, Gaza, the west bank, Lebanon and beyond, and we stand with all communities here in the United Kingdom against hatred of Jews or Muslims, because any attack on a minority is an attack on our proud values of tolerance and respect, and we will not stand for it.

With the middle east close to the brink, and the very real danger of a regional war, last week the Iranian regime chose to strike Israel. The whole House will join me in utterly condemning this attack. We support Israel's right to defend herself against Iran's aggression in line with international law. Let us be very clear: this was not a defensive action by Iran; it was an act of aggression and a major escalation in response to the death of a terrorist leader. It exposes once again Iran's malign role

in the region. It helped equip Hamas for the 7 October attacks. It armed Hezbollah, which launched a year-long barrage of rockets at northern Israel, forcing 60,000 Israelis to flee their home, and supports the Houthis, who mount direct attacks on Israel and continue to attack international shipping.

I know the whole House will join me in thanking our brave servicemen and servicewomen, who have shown their usual courage in countering this threat, but make no mistake: the region cannot endure another year of this. Civilians on all sides have suffered too much. All sides must now step back from the brink and find the courage of restraint. There is no military solution to these challenges, so we must renew our diplomatic efforts. Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, I have had discussions with the leaders of Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, the G7 and the European Union, and made the case at the United Nations for political solutions to end the fighting.

In the weeks ahead, we will continue that work, focusing on three areas. The first is Lebanon, where our immediate priority is the safety of British citizens. Our team is on the ground, helping to get people out. We have already brought more than 430 people home on chartered flights, and we stand ready to make additional evacuation efforts as necessary. I again give this important message to British citizens still in Lebanon: you must leave now. We are also working to ease the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon—last week we provided £10 million of vital support, in addition to the £5 million we are already providing to UNICEF—but the situation cannot go on. We will continue to lead calls for an immediate ceasefire, and for the return to a political plan for Lebanon based on Security Council resolution 1701, which requires Hezbollah to withdraw north of the Litani river. They must stop firing rockets and end this now, so that people on both sides of the border can return to their homes.

Secondly, we must renew efforts for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, but we cannot simply wait for that to happen. We must do more now to provide relief to the civilian population. That is why we have restarted aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. We are supporting field hospitals, and the delivery of water, healthcare and treatment for malnourished children, but the ongoing restrictions on aid are impossible to justify. Israel must open more crossings and allow lifesaving aid to flow. Crucially, Israel must provide a safe environment for aid workers. Too many have been killed, including three British citizens. Israel must act now, so that, together with our allies, we can surge humanitarian support ahead of winter.

Thirdly, we must put in place solutions for the long term, to break the relentless cycle of violence. The ultimate goal here is well understood: it must be a two-state solution. There is no other option that offers stability and security. We need to build a political route towards it, so that Israel is finally safe and secure, alongside the long-promised Palestinian state. That requires support for the Palestinian Authority to step into the vacuum in Gaza; it requires an urgent international effort to support reconstruction; and it requires guarantees for Israel's security. We will work with our allies and partners to that end, but the key to all this remains a ceasefire in Gaza now, the unconditional release of the

hostages, and the unhindered flow of aid. That is the fundamental first step to change the trajectory of the region.

Nobody in this House can truly imagine what it feels like to cower under the bodies of their friends, hoping a terrorist will not find them, mere minutes after dancing at a music festival. Nobody in this House can truly imagine seeing their city, home, schools, hospitals and businesses obliterated, with their neighbours and family buried underneath. It is beyond our comprehension, and with that should come a humility. It is hard even to understand the full depth of this pain, but what we can do is remember. What we can do is respect and listen to the voices that reach out to us at these moments, and what we can do is use the power of diplomacy to try to find practical steps that minimise the suffering on the ground and work towards that long-term solution, so that a year of such terrible and bloody conflict can never happen again. That is what we have done on the Labour Benches, it is what the whole House has done, and it is what this Government will continue to do. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the Opposition.

3.45 pm

Rishi Sunak (Richmond and Northallerton) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement.

Today is the anniversary of 7 October. This modern pogrom—the worst loss of Jewish life since the second world war—was a horrendous reminder of the antisemitism in our world and the existential threats that Israel faces. Over the past year, many of the hostages kidnapped by Hamas on 7 October have been raped, sexually abused, murdered, and mutilated beyond recognition. Today, a year on, many still remain held by Hamas and other terrorist groups. I think particularly today of the British citizen Emily Damari, who has endured a year in captivity. Across this House, I know that we join in saying, “Bring them home.”

The situation in the middle east is grave. Too many innocent civilian lives have been lost. It is right that this country continues to play its part in defending Israel against Iranian attacks, but we should not forget the base cause of all these events: Iran’s refusal to accept Israel’s right to exist, and its desire to destabilise the region through arming and funding its terrorist proxies—Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. The current conflict in Lebanon is a result of Hezbollah’s determination to use this territory to launch rocket attacks on Israel. Let me be clear: Israel has a right to defend itself, it has a right to eliminate the leadership of Hezbollah, and it has a right to restore security for its citizens. This country should support Israel in pursuing those goals, but can the Prime Minister expand on what he said about what role the United Kingdom is playing in providing humanitarian support to those Lebanese citizens who have been displaced because of this conflict? I welcome his announcements on some financial support to that end.

The medium-term question that we must help to address is what happens once the Israeli operation has finished. I ask the Prime Minister to update the House on what steps this country, along with our allies, is taking

to help to build up the capacity of the Lebanese state so that Hezbollah cannot simply re-establish itself in southern Lebanon. We must never forget that Hezbollah does not represent the interests of Lebanon or its citizens; it represents those of its paymasters in Tehran.

Turning to the situation of British nationals in Lebanon, I know that the Government have rightly been urging them to leave for some time now, but it is clear that difficulties in obtaining tickets on commercial flights mean that a number of our citizens are still there. I welcome the Government’s chartering of planes to help British nationals to return home, and know very well the logistical challenges involved. I pay tribute to all the Foreign Office and other teams who will be working hard to make sure that that happens. Can the Prime Minister assure the House that any British national who wishes to leave Lebanon will be able to do so on a Government-chartered flight?

Turning next to the Prime Minister’s speech at the UN General Assembly, which he mentioned, I fully endorse his reaffirmation that the United Kingdom will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes. Events in the middle east, and indeed Ukraine, are another reminder that the world is increasingly becoming more dangerous. If we wish to be able to continue to deter our enemies, defend our values and stand up for our interests, we will need to invest more in our military. The Prime Minister and I have discussed previously my view that we should increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2030, and in our previous exchanges in this House he has said that a trajectory for future defence spending would be set out at the coming fiscal event. I ask that he reconfirm his commitment to that timetable.

On this sad anniversary, I finish by saying that the United Kingdom stands with Israel against this terrorism today, tomorrow and always. I say to the Jewish community here in Britain that I know that at moments like this, when the Jewish people are under attack in their homeland, Jewish people everywhere can feel less safe. I know that the Prime Minister will agree with me that, across this House, we will always stand against the evils of antisemitism.

The Prime Minister: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his words. On an occasion like this, it is important that we speak with one voice across the House, and I think the whole House will agree with him that we must bring the hostages home. They must be uppermost in our minds.

The Leader of the Opposition asks about the assistance in Lebanon. Humanitarian assistance is being provided—aid and money, as well as training, as he will know—and we are working towards the Security Council resolution.

On evacuations, we will make sure that any British national has the assistance they need to come home. I repeat that now is the time to leave. If any British national requires assistance, I ask them please to make contact with us so that we can provide it.

In relation to defence spending, let me recommit to increasing it to 2.5%. We will set out our plans in due course, but the most important thing today is for this House to do as it is doing: speaking with one voice on the one-year anniversary of an awful terrorist attack.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): On this anniversary, the House unites in its condemnation of the murder of more than 1,000 Israeli citizens and makes a united call for the release of 100 hostages. Parliament also stands behind a belief in the rules-based international order—a belief that all civilian life is equal and must be protected. Today, we mark a year during which more than 41,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, 742 people have been killed in the west bank and more than 2,000 people have been killed in Lebanon. Will the Prime Minister confirm that all British actions in the middle east will be guided by the principles of de-escalation, peace and diplomacy, and the protection of all civilian life?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question, particularly her words about all civilian life being equal and protected. I confirm that everything that we are doing is aimed at de-escalating across the region. It is on the brink, and it is important for all sides to pull back from the brink. That is why we have been working so closely with our allies in the G7 on de-escalation, speaking with one voice.

Mr Speaker: I call the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement.

On the anniversary of the horrific attacks in Israel, we remember the victims, the people taken hostage and their families, and we stand with the whole Jewish community. Earlier this year, I visited Israel and Palestine, and saw how both peoples were experiencing trauma. We must never forget the trauma of the hostages and their families. In Tel Aviv, I met Itzik Horn, a father still praying for his two sons, Yair and Eitan, to come home. We must urge all actors to take the steps most likely to get the hostages home quickly and safely.

The past year has seen terrible violence in the middle east, a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and an appalling spike in hate crimes here in the UK. We must stand firm against antisemitism and Islamophobia, we must press for an immediate bilateral ceasefire to end the terrible cycle of violence and bring about lasting peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians, and we must do all we can to prevent a regional war in the middle east. UK forces rightly played their part in helping Israel to neutralise Iran's outrageous attacks, and I hope that the Government will now try to convince Israel that keeping her citizens safe and secure is best achieved by restraint, not retaliation and the risk of a regional war. As we do that, let us take a tougher stance on Iran and all her proxies, from Hezbollah to the Houthis. Will the Prime Minister finally proscribe Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps?

We are horrified by the new crisis unfolding in Lebanon. Will the Government go further on humanitarian aid? Most importantly, we join the Prime Minister in calling for the cessation of rocket fire, the protection of civilians, and an immediate bilateral ceasefire, just like the one that we so desperately need in Gaza.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for those questions. I absolutely agree with him in relation to the hostage families. When I sat with them, we often sat in silence because they could not find the

words to describe what they were going through. I also agree with what he said about hate crimes. The message and the messaging is very much de-escalation across the region. He is right that we need to deal with state threats, including the IRGC. We are working at pace to identify further ways to deal with such threats, including those from the IRGC. More than 400 sanctions designations against Iranian organisations and individuals are already in place, and we continue to look at that important issue.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in condemning that horrific attack one year ago. Yesterday at church during bidding prayers we prayed about the conflicts in the middle east and elsewhere. My thoughts remain with those loved ones who are still displaced a year on.

Sadly, the United Nations has reported credible evidence of sexual violence against innocent civilians on both sides of the conflict. No matter the intensity of the situation, there can be no justification for sexual violence, which leaves victims traumatised for many years. What steps are the Government taking to raise that issue and ensure that innocent civilians across the middle east are protected from the horrors of sexual violence?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point about sexual violence, which, as she rightly says, has absolutely no justification. Along with other issues, we continue to raise any such allegations with our allies.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): There are many different opinions on policy in the middle east, but does the Prime Minister agree that what must surely unite everyone in this House is our profound detestation of antisemitism in all its shapes and forces, as well as our profound love for the Jewish people on their day of suffering, especially as many of those who were murdered at the music festival and in the kibbutz were actively working for peace? Will he reflect that there are still many people—many Jewish and Arab people—who want a moderate solution, and that we should give them our support?

The Prime Minister: I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Gentleman on antisemitism, and on our love for—and on standing with—the Jewish people, both across the globe and here in the United Kingdom. Many of them want nothing more than peace and security for themselves and their families, and we will continue to work with them. I agree with his remarks and the sentiment behind them.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I very much agree with my right hon. and learned Friend's comments about the need for all sides to work towards a two-state solution. Does he therefore understand the wider concern at the Israeli Prime Minister saying repeatedly in recent weeks that he does not support a two-state solution, either now or in the future? Does my right hon. and learned Friend understand the frustration and anger that that creates among many Palestinians, particularly young ones, and that it breeds a climate in which hostility and violence are likely to increase rather than decrease? What can he do to change the Israeli Prime Minister's mind?

The Prime Minister: We have to be very clear that the two-state solution is the only viable long-term route through this conflict. Recognition has to be a question of when, not if. Israel has a right to be safe and secure—it is not—and we must have a viable Palestinian state. However difficult that may seem at the moment, we must never lose sight of that being, in the end, the only political solution to this awful conflict.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): We are a year on from when 1,200 Jewish people were systematically murdered. Those who were women were raped and mutilated; 254 were taken hostage into Gaza, and 101 remain unaccounted for. I agree with the Prime Minister that we need to make sure the hostages are returned immediately, but the first aspect of that is ensuring that the International Committee of the Red Cross has access to all those hostages in order to assess their state of health and, indeed, whether they are still alive. Will the Prime Minister press for that, to make sure that we know how many are still alive and can be returned to their families? For those who have sadly been murdered, at least their families will know what has happened to them.

The Prime Minister: Yes, that is very important. When spending any time with the families, you get a real sense of the agony they are going through, which is made even worse by the fact that they do not have any meaningful information about their loved ones. I agree with the hon. Gentleman: that is an essential step to at least reduce some of the agony.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): We in my constituency stand today with our neighbour Sharone in saying the name of her father, Oded Lifschitz, a proud peace activist who has been held by Hamas for over a year now. We stand with our Palestinian neighbours who were able to escape from Gaza, who now fear for their relatives and what harm may befall them. We stand with our neighbour trying to get out of Lebanon, where he was trying to support local children to learn. We reject the lazy stereotype in this conflict that we have to pick a side. We pick peace, and we simply ask the Prime Minister to do and show the same, so what reassurance can my right hon. and learned Friend give me and my constituents today that everything that the British have—in fighting for the rule of law, in diplomacy, and even in our work on arms sales—will be dedicated towards peace and resolution for the innocent civilians in these regions?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, which is a reminder of the impact that the conflict is having on so many of our communities here in the United Kingdom. We are absolutely working with our allies on de-escalating across the region. That requires Iran to take responsibility and be held accountable for what it is doing, which is why in my view, it is important for the G7 to speak so powerfully together with a co-ordinated and collaborative approach.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Today is a devastating and sobering day for those who are suffering the pain of grief—it feels that the claws are being run over those wounds again. We have now seen escalation in the region, something that this House

warned about for months before this point. It is clearer now than ever that when the embers finally die down and we can start to rebuild, the Palestinian question must be the No. 1 priority on the Prime Minister's list and those of other world leaders—not because it is the right thing to do, but because it is a security concern that we must address if we want a safer world. Does he agree that we now need to show unprecedented levels of leadership? What is he doing personally to add to that?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for her question—as ever, she speaks powerfully on this issue. I completely agree that the only way through in the long term is the two-state solution. To answer her question directly, we are working non-stop with our allies on that question, answering “What happens next?” and never losing sight of the fact that the two-state solution is the only way to long-lasting peace. We will continue in those efforts, which I know have the support of the House. It is so important that we continue to do so, and we will.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): The Prime Minister rightly says we need a ceasefire now, but after a year and over 45,000 deaths, what more can he do to achieve that ceasefire? While the violence in the region continues, will he ask the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary to look sympathetically at requests for evacuation from dependants and close relatives of UK citizens?

The Prime Minister: On the question of a ceasefire, we are continuing to work with allies to bring that ceasefire about and to co-ordinate our efforts. I recognise that diplomacy is sometimes slow, but it is in the end the only way to bring about that ceasefire, and we will continue with it. In relation to British citizens in Lebanon, we do have a plan in place. If anybody across the House has any details of our citizens who need further assistance, I would genuinely be pleased if they passed them to me, so we can action that straightaway.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): On the anniversary of the terrorist attack last year, may I echo the sentiments of the Prime Minister in condemning Hamas, in supporting our Jewish community and, of course, in calling for the release of all the hostages? I share his concern about the malign influence of Iran. In that regard, can he confirm to the House that there will be no British involvement—be that personnel, facilities or airbases—in any Israeli response to its abhorrent attack last week?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Member for his question. As he will understand, I will not go into details on the Floor of the House as to our capabilities, but he will know that the involvement so far—for example, in relation to the attack in April—related to Israel's self-defence, when missiles were raining in on Israel. That is the support that we did provide and would always be prepared to provide.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): Today, as we remember all those killed in the 7 October Hamas attack and all those killed day after day in Israel's war on Gaza and now Lebanon, the case for peace, the preservation of human life and the protection of human

[Richard Burgon]

life has never been more urgent and compelling. An immediate ceasefire is desperately needed to stop all the killing, end the war crimes, free the hostages and get aid into Gaza. However, it is clear that Israel's right-wing political leaders will keep rejecting ceasefires and keep violating international law without stronger international pressure. To get Israeli leaders to back a ceasefire, do we not need to see tougher action, including an end to all arms sales, as recent international court rulings demand?

The Prime Minister: I completely agree that we need an immediate ceasefire. That is what we are working for and what the US is leading on. I do not agree with a complete ban on arms sales. That would include a ban on arms being used for defensive purposes. Looking at the attack of only a few days ago by Iran, I think the House will understand my position on this and the position of many across the House.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): The Prime Minister has rightly spoken about the significance of diplomacy right now, and I think the entire House would agree that, across the region itself, leaders must come together. What discussions has the Prime Minister had with Gulf Co-operation Council leaders about the behaviour—the aggressive behaviour—of their neighbour Iran, and what role they can play in de-escalation and preventing Iran from further escalating this terrible conflict?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Member for that question. This is a really important issue. We have had numerous discussions with our colleagues and with leaders, and I do think there is an important role that can be played and pressure that can be applied through those discussions. We will continue to do so, so I thank her for her question.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Among those killed in the horrors of 7 October were children, with a number still held hostage to this day. In Gaza since then, there is a grisly new acronym—WCNSF: wounded child, no surviving family—to add to the child death toll, which is now rising in Lebanon as well. Will my right hon. and learned Friend press for the protection of children in advocating for a ceasefire and in his humanitarian efforts, and does he agree that no parent should ever have to bury their child?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with that, whether it is children taken as hostages—it hardly seems possible to say that sentence without recoiling—or those orphaned in Gaza, as my hon. Friend rightly suggests.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I appreciate that it is difficult to get into the mind of a theocratic regime such as that of the ayatollahs in Iran, but to what extent have the Government been able to establish whether a principal motivation for what happened on 7 October was the desire of the Iranian regime to prevent a rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, its great rival?

The Prime Minister: Iran bears huge responsibility across the region, both in its assistance in relation to the 7 October attack and through the other action that it is

supporting in the region. That is why we have been clear in our positioning on Iran, and clear about the responsibility that Iran bears in relation to those awful incidents.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Ind): On the anniversary of the horrific 7 October attacks, I again repeat the call for the immediate release of all hostages. In light of Israel's genocidal assault in Gaza, the violence in the west bank and the invasion of Lebanon, does the Prime Minister believe that Israel's right to self-defence justifies a death toll that, according to research by US medical professionals who have worked in Gaza, has now surpassed 118,000, as well as the 2,000 people killed in Lebanon? Will he do what is morally and legally right and end the Government's complicity in war crimes by banning all arms sales to Israel, including the F-35 fighter jet, and not just 30 licences—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: No, but it is a really serious point. Banning all sales would mean none for defensive purposes—

Zarah Sultana: F-35 fighter jets.

The Prime Minister: It would mean none for defensive purposes. On the anniversary of 7 October and days after a huge attack by Iran into Israel, that would be the wrong position for this Government and I will not take it.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Prime Minister has rightly pointed out that the conflict in the middle east has been manipulated and sponsored by the Iranian regime. We should stand by Israel, which is bearing the burden, taking the risks and standing up to world opinion in taking on Iran and its proxy terrorist groups. What part can our Government play in putting pressure on the Iranian regime, and why is it that the revolutionary guards who are sponsoring much of this terrorism can still operate freely in London?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we must stand by Israel and be absolutely clear about Israel's right to defend herself, particularly at this time of escalation by Iran. On the Iranian regime, we have to be really clear that we stand with Israel and clear in condemning Iran, and we have to do that with our allies with one voice, so that the message is heard very powerfully.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): May I associate myself with the condemnation of the atrocities committed by Hamas a year ago? That said, there is a growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the restriction on aid is unacceptable. What more can the international community do to achieve the free movement of aid into Gaza?

The Prime Minister: I addressed that in my statement: we need to get more humanitarian aid in; it is desperately needed, and has been needed for a very long time. That is why we continue to press for that aid to go in, and for the protection to go in for those who will be delivering it once the aid gets into Gaza, as is desperately needed.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Since the barbaric attack on 7 October, we have seen an explosion in antisemitism and extremism on the streets of our own country. Only on Saturday, we saw people flagrantly valorising Hezbollah in London. We must root out

those who despise our country and our values. What will the Prime Minister do to revoke the visas, where appropriate, of those in the UK who are conducting themselves in this manner, to encourage the police to enforce our existing laws without fear or favour, and to further ban and proscribe organisations such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps which do not support the UK, our values, and the way we wish to conduct ourselves in the world?

The Prime Minister: We are proud of the democratic right to protest in this country, but supporting a proscribed terrorist group is unacceptable, and we need to be very clear about that and give the police our full support in taking the action they need to take in relation to that, wherever it is in the United Kingdom.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): As we mark the anniversary of the horrific Hamas attacks, the subsequent colossal death and destruction and the ensuing escalation in the region, we should say for anybody in any doubt in the country that Iran is no friend of ours. Indeed, it is disliked by many of its neighbouring Arab nations for its destabilising activities in the region. It was abundantly clear to many of us that as soon Iran came to the aid of its proxy Hezbollah, Israel's allies would come to its aid to protect it from Iranian missiles. However, it is extremely frustrating that Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to ignore the international community and the UN Security Council resolutions. Our own Prime Minister was one of the first to call for an immediate ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, and this UK Parliament voted eight months ago for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. How exactly will the UK Government help to bring all sides to the negotiating table and secure peace?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's comments about Iran are absolutely right. We must stand with Israel in the face of the attacks, wherever they come from and wherever they are sponsored. In direct answer to his question, we are working with our allies on de-escalation. We are working with the US in particular on its plan for a ceasefire, because it is only through a ceasefire that we can create the space for the hostages to be safely released, for the aid to get into the region and for a foot in the door for a political two-state solution, which is the only way to lasting peace.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The Prime Minister spoke rightly of the fact that we can barely imagine the pain of the Israeli families and those in Gaza affected over the past year since that Hamas atrocity, but it is also a pain felt acutely in our own communities, by our Jewish communities and by our Muslim communities. We have had 5,000 antisemitic attacks in this country since that atrocity—a record number—so what will the Prime Minister do to reassure the Jewish and Muslim communities and to work with the Community Security Trust and Tell MAMA to strengthen their bonds?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an important point. We have upped the support to communities as a result of the dreadful rise in hate crime in all its manifestations in the past year or so, and we will continue to do so. I know we will have the support of the House in doing so.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): Today is a day of mourning for all those who lost family members on 7 October and those hostages in the tunnels lost since then, and for all those civilians in Gaza, the west bank and now in Lebanon. Like the Prime Minister, I have been meeting hostage families all this past year. The only time hostages got released was when there was a hostage-prisoner deal on 22 November last year and some 150 prisoners and 50 hostages were released. Has the Prime Minister spoken to the Israeli Government about another deal to allow the hostages to be released through swapping them with political prisoners held in Israeli jails?

The Prime Minister: I accept my hon. Friend's point that it is through a cessation of hostilities that the space can be created for the release of hostages. Yes, of course we talk to leaders, including in Israel, the whole time about how that can be brought about. It is the central focus of all our discussions with Israel and with our allies.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is vital that today and every day we remember every life lost at the hands of Hamas a year ago and every life lost in captivity since, and that we renew our calls for the release of every hostage. While I totally agree with the Prime Minister when he says that Israel must have that right to defend herself, some of the decisions he has taken have led to a feeling that the Government have stepped back their support for Israel, not least in the restoration of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Does the Prime Minister regret that, and will he revisit that decision, so that actions marry up with words?

The Prime Minister: No, there has been no stepping back of support for Israel. We have been absolutely robust in that support. I have expressed it many times in different places, including to the Prime Minister of Israel. We will continue to support Israel and we will continue to support Israel's right to defend herself. The House is at its best when it speaks with one voice.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It has been a year of profound suffering, darkness and trauma. Tens of thousands of innocent people have been killed and displaced, yet the world has learned nothing. The prospect of a two-state solution is a distant dream and the odds on all-out war in the middle east are growing by the day. The unimaginable devastation has to stop; the only hope is a diplomatic solution. Will the Prime Minister assure me that the Government are doing everything in their power to bring about an immediate and permanent ceasefire across the region?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and we are not doing it alone. We are working with our allies in relation to it—last week, I spoke to G7 allies about it, and we speak constantly to the US about it—because we need to de-escalate across the region. We have seen escalation in recent days and weeks, and all sides need to pull back from the brink.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): On behalf of the Green party, I associate myself with the remarks made by the Prime Minister and others in the House in remembrance of all those who lost their lives and were taken hostage in the horrific terrorist attacks on 7 October

[Ellie Chowns]

last year. One of those was Hayim Katsman, who was murdered by Hamas in Kibbutz Holit. His brother Noy had his words included in a collection of speeches and eulogies published today by Standing Together. Noy said this of Hayim:

“I have no doubt that even in the face of Hamas’ people that murdered him, in the face of their extreme right wing beliefs, he would still call out against killing and violence of innocent people. Here, too, he would be empathetic to pain and oppression.”

Those are powerful words. In that spirit, I express my continued and deep concern at the disproportionate response of Israel to the attacks on 7 October and the extent to which that has perpetuated pain, oppression and the killing of innocent people. In recent days, that response has resulted in an escalation of deadly violence. I welcome the Prime Minister’s words about commitment to de-escalation. Does he agree that an urgent ceasefire both between Israel and Hezbollah and in Gaza is essential to resolving the conflict?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member read out some powerful words, which will have been heard across the House. Yes, de-escalation is absolutely needed at the moment as the region stands on the brink.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): Mr Speaker, may I associate myself with your words and those of the Prime Minister in opening his statement? In any time of conflict, our focus must be on two things: de-escalation and peace; and the plight of the civilian population, whether they be those hostages kidnapped on 7 October, those in Lebanon now sheltering in the street or those in Gaza who seek to find health facilities to treat their loved ones and themselves when they suffer from attacks by Israel. What more can we do to support the health service in Lebanon, which is now on its knees and really needs our support if it is to help the people of Lebanon?

The Prime Minister: We do need to help and assist with the health services in Lebanon—along with the other humanitarian support and the support for training and other matters that we are putting in, it is so important that we do that. We are in constant contact with the Lebanese authorities in relation to that.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Many of us have been fortunate enough to see the good work that UNRWA has done on the ground over many years, but, to be effective, an aid delivery vehicle needs to be rigorously impartial. Given that, will the Government treat UNRWA with caution and carefully, and remember that other aid delivery agencies are available?

The Prime Minister: We of course have to be careful to ensure that any agency absolutely complies with international law and, where there are any allegations, we must ensure that they are properly investigated and any wrongdoing is rooted out. We do have to provide, or help to provide, aid across the region, but that is caveated by the first part of my statement in relation to the point that the right hon. Gentleman rightly raises.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I wish to put on the record my sorrow at the appallingly violent events of 7 October one year ago in southern Israel, and at all the days of violence we have

witnessed since. Since the House last met, the forced displacement of almost 2 million residents of Gaza by Israel’s military action has been compounded by a further half a million people forcibly displaced in Lebanon, again by Israeli military action. Does the Prime Minister share the concerns of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, that in destroying civilian infrastructure, killing civilians and impacting humanitarian operations, the Israeli invasion is a breach of international law? What further steps will the Prime Minister take to enforce a ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to accept invitations to agree with other people’s assessments. I will make my own. I have been absolutely clear that Israel has the right to defend herself in accordance with international law. The displacement is a very serious issue across the region. Very many people have been displaced and many of them simply want to go home. That includes Israelis who have been displaced from their homes as well. That is why we need to de-escalate: to ensure that those displaced can return back and live safely in their own communities.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): In just 15 months, Iran will be free of many of the restrictions under the joint comprehensive plan of action on its production of centrifuges and its uranium enrichment. Given the new nexus of evil of North Korea, Iran and Russia on nuclear technology transfer, does the Prime Minister believe the JCPOA is still fit for purpose?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman raises a really important point in relation to the nuclear ambitions that we absolutely have to be alive to. We must ensure that Iran cannot possibly get weapons. The sanctions, and the regime around them, must be geared towards that central issue.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I extend my heartfelt sympathies to the families who lost loved ones in the terror attack a year ago, as well as to those who have loved ones that are held in captivity at the moment. I would also like to do the same for ordinary Palestinian civilians who have lost loved ones in the violence of the past year. It is quite clear that, given the heightened tension across the region, an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the west bank and Lebanon is not possible. The Prime Minister has talked about a road map; will he share with us what the steps are towards a peace process and the immediate ceasefire that is desperately needed in the region?

The Prime Minister: I accept that an immediate ceasefire is difficult; I do not accept that it is impossible. The US and Qatar are working hard on this, and they have our full support in the action they are taking. The reason why the US is leading on this is that it well understands the importance of a ceasefire to create the space for all the other relief that needs to be provided and, of course, for the hostages to be released.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The House knows that when events unfold abroad they often reverberate on our streets here at home. Despite the trauma of the last 12 months, I am incredibly proud that rabbis, imams and other religious leaders in St Albans have

worked hand in glove to make a bold statement called “Five principles for dialogue: why Jews and Muslims refuse to hate each other”. They have taken that statement into our primary schools, secondary schools and community forums. It has had a profound effect in my community. Is the relevant Government Department actively seeking out examples of such initiatives to build or, where necessary, rebuild interfaith dialogue and community cohesion across the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Yes, because that joint work is really important. Some of the interfaith work done before 7 October did not have the resilience that many of us thought and hoped it would have. Rebuilding it is hard but it should be supported wherever it takes place. I was interested to hear the particular example that the hon. Lady referred to.

Abtissam Mohamed (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for his comments. My thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by the violence and war over the past year. Human rights and international law apply equally and without favour. All lives matter—Palestinian, Israeli and Lebanese. When breaches of international law are committed, they should be condemned equally. Does the Prime Minister agree that a ceasefire in Gaza is the best way to de-escalate violence? Will he give assurances that this Government will do all they can to support diplomatic measures and keep an open review of arms sales? Does he agree that we must, at all cost, avoid getting involved in a middle eastern war that could have catastrophic consequences both here and abroad?

The Prime Minister: We are working constantly with our allies to de-escalate the situation, to hold those responsible to account and to ensure that we bring about the much sought-after peace that all communities want.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): As well as the terrible loss of life of Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese citizens, a shocking number of journalists have been killed or wounded while covering events in the middle east. Will the Prime Minister pay tribute to the courage of journalists who are risking their lives daily simply to do their job? Will he re-emphasise the importance of protecting and respecting all media workers who are covering conflict?

The Prime Minister: Yes and yes. It is a very important point. Journalists and those working in the media are risking their lives to ensure that the rest of us have information about what is happening on the ground. Too many have lost their lives, and we must respect that and pay tribute to the really important work that they do. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising a really important issue.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): Today is a day for sombre remembrance of the suffering on all sides, but if the threatened war against Iran takes place, we will need to revisit that discussion in this Chamber. I am pleased that the Prime Minister has rightly demonstrated our concern about the suffering on all sides, and particularly mentioned the suffering of children. When the Ukraine war started, we set up the scheme to evacuate children who were seriously injured to come here for treatment.

In January I raised the prospect of that scheme being introduced for Palestinian children and others. I raised it again in May. In July I wrote to my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary. I wrote again in August, and again in September. There does not seem to be any progress on developing such a scheme, despite the willingness of clinicians here. Could the Prime Minister look at how we can achieve progress?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Member is right to emphasise the impact that this has on children in particular. We have special responsibilities to children in any conflict. The first step to protecting children is to create the conditions for a ceasefire and de-escalate, which is why, working with our allies, we are spending so much time on that de-escalation and finding a route to a ceasefire.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): In February I stood in the wreckage of some of the kibbutzim where the atrocities took place on 7 October. I was struck by the families we met and their desire for peace rather than revenge. Since then, I am afraid to say that I have heard Minister after Minister at the Dispatch Box mouth the words of peace and de-escalation, yet the situation has got worse and worse. How many more people will have to die before we realise that talking is not enough, and we have to take action with our partners to compel a ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: What happens at the Dispatch Box is the reporting back of the action we are taking elsewhere—that is under this Government and under the last Government—and when not at the Dispatch Box, we are working with our allies to bring about a ceasefire. I accept it is difficult; I accept it has not yet happened. I refuse to give up on the idea that, through diplomacy, we can reach that de-escalation and ceasefire. We will continue to work with our allies to do so. What we have tried to do, particularly in recent weeks, is co-ordinate with our allies so we speak and take action in one co-ordinated way. That, for me, is more powerful than each nation taking action separately.

Tracy Gilbert (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I associate myself with the words of hon. and right hon. Members today, and add my thoughts to the families and the hostages who were taken a year ago. I too hope for their safe return. Latest figures suggest that approximately 6,000 Lebanese nationals are in the UK with a temporary right to remain. Lebanese nationals in Edinburgh have recounted to me their fears about returning home and their concerns about the inevitable humanitarian crisis that will follow should the conflict continue. Will the Government commit to looking at options to ensure no Lebanese national currently in the UK is forced to return to Lebanon during the current conflict?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can give that assurance. It is very important. We need to get British nationals who are in Lebanon out of Lebanon as quickly and safely as possible, and we certainly should not be returning people back to the conflict zone while the conflict is going on.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion Preseli) (PC): Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary delivered important statements at the UN last month, emphasising the

[Ben Lake]

importance of upholding both the principles and the purposes of the UN charter as a foundation for the rules-based international order. The Prime Minister rightly states today that a political settlement is the only route to a lasting peace and stability in the region. In working towards that aim, what consideration are the Government giving to official recognition of Palestinian statehood?

The Prime Minister: The question of recognition is a question of when, not if. [Interruption.] Well, at the point of greatest impact. We need a two-state solution. We need to work with our allies towards that end. We will continue to do so, because this conflict will not de-escalate until there is a political route through.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Ind): It is with profound sadness that we take stock of the past year in which 1,200 Israelis were killed by Hamas's horrific attack and over 41,000 Palestinians and thousands in Lebanon have been killed by the Israeli military onslaught. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that all lives should be cherished—Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese—and that nothing can ever justify the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure? Will he join me in calling for a ceasefire and accountability in the region of the middle east?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree that all lives should be cherished, and I think that is the position across the House. As I have said, de-escalation and a ceasefire is the only way forward, which is why we are working so hard on it.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): While I welcome the Prime Minister's call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, there is so much more he can do to bring that about. As South Africa's Foreign Minister said, the decision to stop the fighting in Gaza is in the hands of those who supply Israel with weapons. He knows that international law does not differentiate between offensive weapons and defensive weapons, so why does he continue to license 90% of weapon sales to Israel when there is ample proof that UK weapons are still being used to prolong this catastrophe?

The Prime Minister: For the reason I have twice stated. If the sale of weapons for defensive use by Israel were banned, that is a position I could not countenance a year after 7 October. It is not a position I could countenance in the face of attacks by Iran. The whole House saw the number of missiles coming over into Israel only the other day. The idea that we could say we support Israel's right to defend herself, and at the same time deprive her of the means to do so, is so wholly inconsistent that it will never be my position.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): The scale of the devastation that we have seen in the middle east is appalling. In recent weeks, 127 innocent children have been killed in Lebanon. The scale of death is appalling, and the potential for further escalation is terrifying. Can the Prime Minister tell the House how he is working with his fellow world leaders to push for de-escalation and a peaceful settlement?

The Prime Minister: We are working constantly with our colleagues and allies, whether in the G7 or bilaterally. We have numerous daily contacts to bring about the de-escalation that is so desperately needed.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Hezbollah began its latest assault on Israel on 8 October, the day after Hamas's attacks on Israel. The Iran-backed terror group has fired more than 12,000 rockets towards Israel over the past year, but the international community called for a ceasefire only after Israel had responded. The Prime Minister has said that he is committed to standing by Israel against the threats that it faces, but will he deliver on his commitment to proscribing Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps?

The Prime Minister: I gave an answer earlier on the issue of the IRGC. We do need to address state threats; we are looking into how we can do that, and will continue to do so.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): As the Prime Minister has said, the horrific Hamas attacks a year ago inflicted unbearable pain and loss on Israeli civilians, and we continue to condemn those attacks in the strongest terms. I remember clearly, too, the fear that my then colleagues in Gaza, Palestinian aid workers, felt as bombs began dropping on them that night. The healthcare system in Gaza is now all but destroyed, and according to the United Nations there have been 36 recent attacks on healthcare facilities in Lebanon. Israeli forces are also now using fighter jets to bomb refugee camps in the west bank. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is unacceptable? As he will know, the UK Government are the United Nations Security Council lead on the protection of civilians. Next month, when the UK has the United Nations Security Council presidency, will he ensure that there is a focus on their protection?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks with great experience. Yes, we need aid to get into the region, and we need to protect aid workers, because that is the only way in which the aid can get to where it is needed.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): Today we mark that terrible anniversary of the biggest slaughter of Jews since the second world war. We must also note that since that day, more than 60,000 Israelis have been displaced in northern Israel by the actions of Hezbollah. The Israeli Government have had no choice but to mobilise the Israel Defence Forces, and any Israeli citizen can have to be involved in that.

I am proud of the fact that yesterday Leeds held a multi-faith remembrance service in Millennium Square, attended by more than 1,000 people. Does the Prime Minister agree that that is in marked contrast to the individual who drove the Jewish chaplain of Leeds into hiding because, as an Israeli citizen, he had to serve as a member of the IDF? Is that not an act of pure hatred and antisemitism?

The Prime Minister: We must hunt down that hatred wherever we see it, and the right hon. Gentleman is right to raise it and to call it out. We must focus on the multi-faith work to which he referred: I think that, across the House, we want to see more of it. He is also right about the displacement in northern Israel. Many families

simply want to return to their homes, on both sides of the border, and we must never forget the impact that it has on them.

Nesil Caliskan (Barking) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement on what is a sombre and sobering day as we reflect on the past year—the atrocities of 7 October last year, and, of course, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and now in Lebanon. In my constituency are communities who have links with Israel, with Gaza, with Palestine and also with Lebanon, and they raise with me regularly the need for an immediate ceasefire. Does the Prime Minister recognise that that ceasefire is a critical step towards what, in the end, can be the only solution: a political solution for the region?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and that is why we are working with allies, including the United States, on seeking to bring it about.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): There have been 1,200 butchered and more than 250 hostages taken, more than 100 of whom are still there, including Emily Damari, a 28-year-old British citizen. Will the Prime Minister recommit himself today to doing whatever it takes—to leaving no stone unturned—in ensuring that she is returned to her family, and that, if necessary, British assets are used to help to extract her?

The Prime Minister: Yes, absolutely; that is the commitment I gave to her mother and the other families I met last week, and on various other occasions before that. I have sat with her mother and seen at first hand the utter agony that she is going through, as any parent would in those circumstances. I gave her that commitment and I repeat it here.

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and associate myself with the clear calls for unimpeded access to aid, an immediate ceasefire and an immediate return of the hostages? Since the heinous terrorist attack one year ago, we have seen here at home a consequential increase in crimes of hate, antisemitism and other forms of hatred. I know his commitment to tackling the scourge of such hatred—I have seen it up close—so will he assure me that his Government will continue to challenge all such forms of hatred, both here and abroad?

The Prime Minister: Yes, absolutely; we can and we must. Across the House, we all know the impact of hate crime, and we have all been horrified by the increase over the last 12 months. We have a duty and a responsibility to do everything we can to reduce it, and we will work with others to do so.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): May I, too, join the Prime Minister in offering my condolences to the families of all those who have been killed and those who continue to be killed? I also join the Prime Minister in relation to the release of hostages—all hostages, including the children who are held in Israeli detention centres without charge and without any legal representation. Given what he said in relation to self-defence, which is a moot point, is he stating to the House that all offensive weapons are banned and that only defensive weapons are being supplied?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will well know the legal framework. We have domestic legislation in place that was passed and applied by successive Governments, and we have international obligations. We have taken our decisions in accordance with that legislation, as the House would expect, and we have published a summary of our reasons for doing so, for the House to examine.

Joani Reid (East Kilbride and Strathaven) (Lab): May I, too, express my heartfelt sympathy and condolences to all those affected by the terrorist attacks on 7 October? I thank the Prime Minister for his statement today. Does he agree that the sharp rise in antisemitism that we have seen since 7 October—it has now reached the highest level ever recorded in the UK—is a stain on our democracy? May I ask him to give reassurances to Jewish communities across the UK that his Government are doing everything they can to ensure their security and safety, and to tackle the scourge of antisemitism?

The Prime Minister: Let me give that reassurance. I think we are all shocked by the sharp rise in antisemitism, and we need to work with all communities to bring down hate crime, whichever community it is aimed at—whether it is the Jewish community, the Muslim community or any other community.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for clarifying the Government's position on Israel's right to defend itself. Will he and the Home Secretary clarify to the House what steps are being taken to tackle violent disorder and antisemitism in London? Many members of the British Jewish communities here in London feel under threat, and this weekend we saw violent protest. What will the Government do to tackle that and to make our British Jewish communities feel safe again?

The Prime Minister: We have to support the right of freedom of protest but, at the same time, be absolutely clear that support for terrorist organisations is not to be tolerated. We will work with the police and other law enforcement agencies to ensure that we tackle it and stand very firm on it.

Matthew Patrick (Wirral West) (Lab): Today, as at so many times in the history of the Jewish people, we are bound in grief and mourning. Will the Prime Minister assure the Jewish community that we are not alone in that grief, and will he take this opportunity to join me in praising the dignity, courage and love shown by the families and friends of the hostages in their efforts to bring them home?

The Prime Minister: Let me give that assurance that they are not alone, and let me pay tribute again to the families. It is incredibly moving to spend any time with them and to hear at first hand what they are going through. As I have said to them every time I have met them, the impact that this has on anybody listening to them, and the impact it has on me, is profound.

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I join the Prime Minister and the House in offering my condolences to the families of all those Israeli civilians killed on 7 October, and of all innocent civilians—Israeli,

[Iqbal Mohamed]

Palestinian, Lebanese or any other—killed over the last 12 months. Over the last 12 months, more than 950 Palestinian bloodlines have been wiped off the face of the earth—no family member remains from those generations. Over 1,000 families have only one sole survivor remaining living today. What message does the Prime Minister have for the British Palestinians and the surviving Palestinians in the affected region, and what is he doing to protect them from the same fate as the 42,000 and counting?

The Prime Minister: There has been far too much bloodshed and killing, and far too many children orphaned. I give my assurance that we will do everything we can, and we are doing everything we can, to de-escalate and to bring about a ceasefire to allow much-needed aid to go in and hostages to come out, but I absolutely understand the strength of the point that the hon. Member puts to me.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The Prime Minister said that I stand with Israel. I stand with peace; I stand with the Israeli people and with the Palestinians and the Lebanese equally. This is not mere semantics. I applaud the involvement of the UK military in protecting Israelis at the weekend, but where is the equivalent for the people of Gaza, Beirut and elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: It is in the work that we are doing to bring about de-escalation and a ceasefire, because that is the only route through. That is why we are working with our allies so closely on those issues and will continue to do so.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): The tragedy of the deaths a year ago has now been compounded by tens of thousands more deaths in Gaza, the west bank and Lebanon. Gaza is now reduced to a place of rubble, famine, thirst and premature death, and lots of children looking for their families. The bombs that have rained down on Gaza and other places are in part supplied by this country. The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court have both given strong opinions on the situation there. Will the Prime Minister revisit the whole situation of the sale of British arms that are being used to bomb Gaza and kill wholly innocent Palestinian civilians?

The Prime Minister: We have set out our position: domestic law is clear, international law is clear, and we have taken our decision and put a summary of that before the House.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): If we in this House, at this distance, can feel the pain of that dastardly attack a year ago, we can but imagine its indelible imprint on the people of Israel and on Jewish folk across the world. What is the Prime Minister's view of the fact that our national broadcaster, the BBC, refuses to call those who perpetrated this heinous terrorist attack "terrorists", and likewise now with Hezbollah? What is the Government's position on that and what representations have they made?

The Prime Minister: The Government's position is that Hamas and Hezbollah are terrorist organisations. We stand very firm on that and rightly call them what they are.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I join the Prime Minister in condemning the Iranian ballistic missile attack on Israel last Tuesday, and I support the role of UK armed forces in defeating it. Back in January, the Prime Minister said that parliamentary approval of military action is needed only when deploying troops. We do not know how Israel will respond to the Iranian attack, and the Government could find themselves asked to contribute at short notice. Can the Prime Minister set out what he meant when he said that a parliamentary debate and vote would happen only when deploying troops?

The Prime Minister: The whole House condemns Iran's attack of a few days ago—we all saw the impact—and the whole House will understand that there will be occasions when it is important for a Government to act without first coming to this House.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Like others, I recently had the sobering experience of meeting some of the hostage families. One person described how his brother had seen his wife, the mother of their new baby, murdered before his eyes, just before he was taken by Hamas. Despite their ordeal, the hostage families I met showed a desire for peace and reconciliation that I found utterly breathtaking and humbling, and it gives me hope. Does the Prime Minister agree that the release of the hostages is not only the right thing to do, in and of itself—of course, it is—but a major key to ending the conflict? Any ceasefire without the release of the hostages is, de facto, not a ceasefire.

The Prime Minister: I agree, which is why we must continue to press for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. I, too, have been struck by the incredible resilience of the families. It is humbling to listen and comprehend what they are going through while they, none the less, insist that there has to be a peaceful way forward for all concerned.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister for his strong statement, which this House supports—well done.

In the light of recent events, it has become clear that Israel's right to defend itself, though verbally supported, is effectively condemned when it takes action. Ever mindful of the 1,200 Israeli citizens who were so brutally murdered a year ago, will the Prime Minister condemn the disgraceful antisemitic demonstrations that took place on the streets of London on Saturday? Will he ensure that all military aid is made available to Israel against the murderous intentions of Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iran?

The Prime Minister: I condemn antisemitism, wherever and whenever it happens. We must stand together across this House to stamp it out.

British Indian Ocean Territory: Negotiations

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the next statement, I remind the Government that I understand, and the whole House understands, that the business of the Government continues during recess and that Ministers will always need to respond to events in the UK and around the world. However, it is frustrating for hon. Members on both sides of the House when major planned announcements are scheduled during periods when the House is not sitting, particularly towards the end of recess.

Although I appreciate the Government informing me directly of the developments on some of these issues, that does not substitute for informing the House. If announcements made towards the end of last week had been held over until after the weekend, hon. Members would have had the first opportunity to question the Secretary of State, rather than learning about it through the media.

Ministers should come to the House to announce their policies in the first instance, even if that means waiting a few days. The excuse that there is an election elsewhere in the world is not my concern, because it is the elected Members on both sides of this House whom I represent.

4.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): Mr Speaker, I am very grateful for your instructions at the beginning of this statement. With permission, I will make a statement on the conclusion of negotiations on the exercise of sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have done the bidding. I do not need others to come in on the back of it.

Mr Lammy: On Thursday 3 October, my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister and Mauritian Prime Minister Jugnauth made an historic announcement: after two years of negotiations and decades of disagreement, the United Kingdom and Mauritius have reached a political agreement on the future of the British Indian Ocean Territory. The treaty is neither signed nor ratified, but I wanted to update the House on the conclusion of formal negotiations at the earliest opportunity.

Members will appreciate the context. Since its creation, the territory and the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia have had a contested existence. *[Interruption.]* In recent years, the threat has risen significantly. When we came into office, the status quo was clearly not sustainable. *[Interruption.]* A binding judgment against the UK seemed inevitable, and it was just a matter of time before our only choices would have been abandoning the base altogether or breaking international law.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): Not true.

Mr Speaker: Order. You will all be able to question the Secretary of State, so please just wait for that moment.

Tom Tugendhat: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: You have been here long enough to know that points of order do not come at this stage. Good try, but it is not working.

Mr Lammy: If Members oppose the deal, which of the alternatives do they prefer? Doing this deal on our terms was the sole way to maintain the full and effective operation of the base into the future. That is why, in November 2022, the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly), initiated sovereignty negotiations. It is also why my predecessor, Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton, ultimately continued with those negotiations. Under the previous Government, there were 11 rounds of negotiations, the last one held just weeks before the general election was called. In July, this Government inherited unfinished business. The threat was real, and inaction was not a strategy.

Inaction posed several acute risks to the United Kingdom. First, it threatened the UK-US base. From countering malign Iranian activity in the middle east to ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific, the base is critical for our national security. Without surety of tenure, no base can operate effectively or truly deter our enemies. Critical investment decisions were already being delayed. Secondly, inaction impacted on our relationship with the United States, which neither wanted nor welcomed the legal uncertainty and strongly encouraged us to strike a deal. I am a transatlanticist, and we had to protect that important relationship. Thirdly, inaction undermined our international standing. We are showing that what we mean is what we say, when it comes to international law and our desire for partnerships with the global south. That strengthens our arguments on issues such as Ukraine or the South China sea.

Further legal wrangling served nobody's interests but our adversaries'. In a more volatile world, a deal benefited us all—the UK, the United States and Mauritius. This Government therefore made striking the best possible deal a priority. We appointed Jonathan Powell as the Prime Minister's special envoy for these negotiations, and he has worked closely with a brilliant team of civil servants and lawyers. Their goal was a way forward that serves UK national interests, respects the interests of our partners, and upholds the international rule of law. The agreement fulfils these objectives. It is strongly supported by partners, with Present Biden going so far as to "applaud" our achievement within minutes of the announcement. Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin have also backed this "successful outcome" which "reaffirms" our "special defence relationship". The agreement has also been welcomed by the Indian Government and commended by the United Nations Secretary-General.

In return for our agreeing to Mauritian sovereignty over the entire islands, including Diego Garcia, the UK-US base has an uncontested long-term future. Base operations will remain under full UK control well into the next century. Mauritius will authorise us to exercise their sovereign rights and authorities in respect of Diego Garcia. This is initially for 99 years, but the UK has the right to extend that. We have full Mauritian backing for robust security arrangements, including to prevent foreign armed forces from accessing or establishing themselves on the outer islands. The base's long-term future is therefore more secure under this agreement than without it.

[Mr Lammy]

If that were not the case, I doubt the White House, State Department or Pentagon would have praised the deal so effusively.

The agreement will be underpinned by a financial settlement that is acceptable to both sides. Members will be aware that the Government do not normally reveal payments for our military bases overseas, so it would be inappropriate to publicise further details of those arrangements at this stage.

The agreement also recognises and rights the wrongs of the past. The whole House would agree that the manner in which Chagossians were forcibly removed in the 1960s was deeply wrong and regrettable. Mauritius is now free to implement a resettlement programme to islands other than Diego Garcia. The United Kingdom and Mauritius have also committed to supporting Chagossians' welfare, establishing a new trust fund capitalised by the UK, and providing additional Government support to Chagossians in the UK. The UK will maintain the pathway for Chagossians to obtain British citizenship. Furthermore, Mauritius and the UK will establish a new programme of visits to the archipelago for Chagossians.

The agreement also ushers in a new era in our relations with Mauritius—a Commonwealth nation and Africa's leading democracy. We have agreed to intensify co-operation on our shared priorities, including security, growth and the environment. The agreement ensures continued protection of the islands' unique environment, which is home to over 200 species of coral and over 800 species of fish.

Finally, I reassure the House and all members of the UK family worldwide that the agreement does not signal any change in policy on Britain's other overseas territories. British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar and the sovereign base areas is not up for negotiation. The situations are not comparable. That has been acknowledged across our overseas territories. Fabian Picardo, Chief Minister of Gibraltar, vocally supported the agreement, stating that there is "no possible read across" to Gibraltar on the issue of sovereignty. Similarly, the Governor of the Falklands has confirmed that the historical contexts of the Chagos islands and the Falklands are "very different".

The Government remain firmly committed to modern partnerships with our overseas territories based on mutual consent. After the Mauritian elections, the Government will move towards treaty signature, and it is our intention to pursue ratification in 2025 by submitting the treaty and a Bill to this House for scrutiny. This is a historic moment, a victory for diplomacy. We have saved the base and secured Britain's national interests for the long term. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

5.9 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for sharing his statement with me in advance. At a time when the world is more dangerous than at any point in our lifetimes, when the middle east is on the edge of serious conflict, when there is war in Europe, and when British military forces

are engaged in protecting an ally from Iranian missiles, the Government propose giving away a key strategic military asset to a state that has never controlled it, and to which the Chagossian people feel little affinity, if any. It is frankly astonishing that this announcement was slipped out at the end of last week, a few days before Parliament returned, to advantage the election timetable of the governing party in Mauritius, rather than in a statement to the House. *The Times* put it well:

"In a dangerous world Britain's security is being risked by ministers and departmental lawyers who believe appeasing faux anti-colonialist sentiment in the UN matters more than the national interest."

UK sovereignty has applied to the British Indian Ocean Territory for more than 200 years. Its strategic location, right in the centre of the Indian ocean, is unmatched, and it houses our one and only military base in the Indo-Pacific. I can tell the House that this is a deal that the former Foreign Secretary, my noble Friend Lord Cameron, would never have done. Nor for that matter would my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly). Had they been willing to do it, the deal would have been concluded long ago. The Conservative Government declined to enter into a deal with Mauritius for reasons that I think are now clear for the House to see. The Labour Government have not published the draft treaty—they have published only a non-legally binding joint statement—so we are somewhat in the dark about exactly what has been agreed. Crucially, can the Foreign Secretary guarantee that there will be a vote on this treaty?

The noble Lord West of Spithead, the most senior military figure ever to hold office in a Labour Government, said that there is

"an irrefutable case that ceding the Chagos Islands to Mauritius would be an irresponsible act, which would put our strategic interests...in danger, while also recklessly undermining fundamental principles of international law."

I would therefore be most grateful if the Foreign Secretary could answer the following five questions. First, never mind what the Chief Minister said; what steps have the Foreign Secretary and the Government taken to reassure the people of Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands that this ill-advised decision will have no effect on their sovereignty? Secondly, and yet more importantly, what steps is the Foreign Secretary taking to make it clear that this decision will have no read-across for the sovereign base areas in Cyprus—Episkopi, Dhekelia and Akrotiri? Thirdly, what assurances has he received that no Chinese military assets will be placed on any of the nearby islands in the archipelago? While his words are welcome, the House needs to see the wording clearly set out.

Fourthly, precisely how much money are we planning that British taxpayers should pay to Mauritius for each year under this deal, as well as in total? We want full transparency on all payments that the Government intend to make, and on what the money is for. What are the payments for the privilege of giving the territory away? Fifthly, what consultations has the Foreign Secretary undertaken with the Chagossian community in this country and elsewhere? We note that his hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) has, with courage and integrity, opposed this deal. It remains to be seen whether others on the Government Benches will have the good sense, courage and integrity so to do. Jonathan Powell has only just been appointed special envoy for

these negotiations; can the Foreign Secretary assure the House that the Government have ensured that there is time for us to draw on his expertise?

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary propose giving away Britain's key strategic assets in the Indian ocean. Little or no attention has been paid to the position of those with direct heritage and family links to Chagos. We have no clear details of any safeguards that will guard against China, a close ally of Mauritius, setting up military facilities and surveillance capacity not far away. Through this statement, the Government give succour to our enemies in a dangerous world, and undermine the strategic web of Britain's defence interests. Our country is the poorer and the lesser for it.

Mr Lammy: It takes some brass neck to criticise this Government for delivering what the last Government tried and failed to do. It was the last Government that opened these negotiations in the first place, because they understood what was at risk. They went through 11 rounds of negotiations and resolved nothing. Instead, as with much that we found across Government, they left it for us to inherit and to fix.

The shadow Foreign Secretary prays in aid the previous Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly), who is now auditioning for the Tory leadership. The right hon. Member for Braintree seems to have suffered short-term memory loss in the past few years, because he told the Commons that, in negotiations with Mauritius,

"Our primary objective is to ensure the continued effective operation of our defence facility on Diego Garcia."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2023; Vol. 734, c. 151.]

That is exactly what we delivered. Do not take my word for it: ask President Biden, Secretary Blinken or Secretary Austin. If this can win the approval of the White House and the Pentagon on the protection of security interests, I think the shadow Foreign Secretary can rest easy and put down some of the bombast.

The reality is that those who do not support the agreement support either abandoning the base or breaking international law. I ask the right hon. Gentleman: which is it? Our agreement secures the base, stops a potentially dangerous illegal migration route, protects the marine areas, provides new support for the Chagossians and ensures that the UK is compliant with international law. There was a time when the Tories believed in international law; they now seem to have given up, and are telling other people basically to go ahead and break it.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that this was a serious negotiation, which the last Government began and left to us to conclude. It secures the future of an important security asset in the Indian ocean. The Conservatives posture; we lead. Parliament will, of course, get the scrutiny that it deserves in the coming months. He knows, too, that this was a negotiation between two Governments, and of course we kept the Chagossians informed all along the way.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): In a parallel reality, may I ask the Foreign Secretary about a particular aspect of the treaty that I do not believe will get a great deal of attention in all the

heat and fury, but that is very important? At a time when our oceans have never been under such stress, the British Indian Ocean Territory is one of the last ocean wildernesses in the world, and tuna trawlers are lining up on the boundary of the no-take zone, trying to entice fish across into their nets. Artisanal fishing by Chagossians who have come home is quite possible in this ecosystem, but licensed fishing is not, and any break in environmental protection will lead to a huge spike in illegal fishing. Will the Foreign Secretary inform the House what provision has been made to ensure the ongoing protection of this unique part of the world once the administration of the islands is handed over to Mauritius, and what involvement the Chagossians have had in that process?

Mr Lammy: I reassure my right hon. Friend that we will of course do everything we can, and have done everything we can—including combating illegal fishing—to better secure the environment. A new marine protected area will be established and managed as part of the deal. We will continue to work with the Mauritians on that marine protected area, and the United States will play its part as well. I am grateful for the question.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. Five years on from the ICJ ruling, the Liberal Democrats welcome the effort to comply with the advice of that Court while protecting our national security interests at a time of global insecurity. However, we put on record our concerns about the way in which that process was conducted, and the risk that it bakes into a new treaty the historic injustices faced by the Chagossian people.

The voice of the Chagossians has been excluded throughout the negotiations and the outcome. That is deeply regrettable. The UK rightly believes in the principle of self-determination, yet there has been no opportunity for the self-determination of Chagossians. Today I met Maxwell Evenor, a Chagossian living in Crawley who is desperate to return to the islands. Maxwell said to me:

"All we have is our voice but that has been silenced for so long."

Will the Foreign Secretary set out how the voices of Chagossians can be injected into the process, even at this late stage? The House was too often bypassed under the last Conservative Government, so I welcome the Foreign Secretary's assurance that there will be proper parliamentary oversight of the final treaty.

Finally, may I express my concern about some of the language used by those on the Benches of the official Opposition in response to this announcement? There is no equivalence between the Chagos islands and other British overseas territories. We must be absolutely clear about that, and I hope that the Foreign Secretary will reaffirm it. For some Conservative Members to entertain the idea that Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands are in some sense at risk is to play into the hands of those who do not share Britain's interests. We in this House must speak with one voice when it comes to Britain's sovereign overseas territories.

Mr Lammy: I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for raising the plight of the Chagossians. The way in which they were treated in the 1960s was wrong and is a matter of immense regret, and he is absolutely right to raise those issues. He will know that this negotiation was between two state parties, as is the way with such matters, and we sought to keep the Chagossians informed along the way. My belief is that the previous Government also sought to do that. I reassure him that a trust fund has been set up to ensure that Chagossians are able to get support. They are also able to apply for citizenship of this country. Although there is not one view among Chagossian groups—he will recognise that there are Chagossians in the Seychelles, in Mauritius and in the United Kingdom, so it is hard to get one view—we will continue to do all we can to support them.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I acknowledge the Foreign Secretary's words on trying to right an historic wrong, and on how that will help to improve relations with the global south. I also note the words of support from our closest ally, the US President. However, what mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that the strategic defence importance of the US-UK base remains after the expiration of the deal? How will we ensure that the voice of the Chagossians, who have never been under Mauritian Government control, will be central to any future arrangement?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to the Chair of the Defence Committee. In relation to the global south, he will have seen that the Government of India welcomed the agreement, and that India committed to continued work with Mauritius and like-minded partners, including the United Kingdom—that was important. The agreement that has been struck can be extended upon completion of the lease. As I said before, we are committed to working with the Chagossians—that is why we have a trust fund set up. Of course, now that Mauritius will effectively be in charge upon completion of the treaty, it is saying that it will work with the Chagossians on resettlements—not on Diego Garcia, but on some of the other islands in the surrounds.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): This is a shameful day for British democracy and a dark moment for human rights in the United Kingdom. Already, the people of the Chagos islands have been forcibly removed from their homeland; today, this Government are handing their home over to a foreign country that is in cahoots with a hostile nation. The Foreign Secretary must commit to allowing the British Chagossian people the right of self-determination—the same right we afford to every other British overseas territory. Are the people of the Chagos islands of less worth than the Falkland Islanders, the Gibraltarians or the people of any other British overseas territory? Will he commit to allowing the people of the Chagos islands to decide their own destiny?

Mr Lammy: I think the hon. Gentleman knows better than that, having chaired the all-party parliamentary group on Mauritius. He knows that these discussions began under the last Government; he will also have read the ICJ judgment and will know it is important that this deal was struck. The last Government left it to us to do it; we did it, and we are proud of it.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): Words that are said in this House bear a huge amount of weight, particularly for citizens in Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. Will the Foreign Secretary clearly set out that nothing in this agreement or in his statement today affects their settled status and their self-determination?

Mr Lammy: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, and of course I agree with him wholeheartedly.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Can I say to the right hon. Gentleman that even when I was on the Government Benches, I was opposed to what my Government were doing, even when they were only going to go halfway? He supported my position then; why has he now turned around?

The one point I want to make to the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Government Front Bench is that the Mauritian Government are guilty of vast human rights abuses, locking up other politicians who are independent, and that the black Creole Mauritians were traduced by that Government. We have handed that Government rights that the Chagossians have never agreed to, so my question is this: why was this done in a rush, just before their election? The Mauritian Government will now use this agreement to benefit themselves in the re-election process. Why are we doing that to support a disgusting Government who are in league with the Chinese?

Mr Lammy: The right hon. Gentleman has immense experience in this House. As Members of this House know, sometimes one is able to strike up friendships across the Floor—we are fellow Spurs supporters—but Mauritius is a country that is part of our Commonwealth, so I cannot possibly associate myself with the remarks that the right hon. Gentleman has just made.

Let us be clear: what was done to the Chagossians back in the 1960s is a matter of regret. It is a sore that has run through our relations with Mauritius, but also with substantial parts of the global south. That is why we continued the negotiations and struck this agreement—the right hon. Gentleman may well have disagreed with the last Government, but I remind him that they undertook 11 rounds of negotiations.

Barry Gardiner (Brent West) (Lab): On the penultimate day of the last Labour Government, the then Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, created the marine protected area around the British Indian Ocean Territory. At that time, it was the largest protected area anywhere in the world. As my right hon. Friend knows, the last time a prosecution was brought for illegal fishing in that area was in 2020, four and a half years ago, and the way in which that prosecution was conducted meant that a £10,000 fine—a mere slap on the wrist—was levied against the vessel. Such vessels take hundreds of thousands of pounds of fish out of that marine protected area. Who is going to pay? How committed are the Government to ensuring that that marine protected area continues to exist, and how will they ensure that the minimal level of protection that is currently in place is increased?

Mr Lammy: I know how my hon. Friend has championed these issues for many years, and I reassure him that this was an issue of intense discussion under the last Government and under this Government. We recognise

the importance of that marine protected area, and when he sees the provisions of the treaty come forward, we can of course have a further discussion on that surety.

Nigel Farage (Clacton) (Reform): It would appear that the judgment—the potential next judgment—of a spurious, rather political foreign Court matters more than the issue of national sovereignty. The Foreign Secretary boasts that President Biden likes this deal. The Speaker said earlier that this House should not be affected by elections that take place in foreign countries, but how confident is the Foreign Secretary that Donald Trump, if he becomes the 47th President of the USA, will approve of this deal, given the importance of our relationship with America?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. Let me reassure him that we have sought to take views across the US political establishment, but I do say to him that to get a US President, a US Secretary of State for foreign affairs and a US Secretary of Defence to applaud this agreement should reassure him that the US would do nothing that helped our enemies, particularly the Chinese, in this regard.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that, despite others trying to score cheap political points and recklessly scaremonger among the residents of our other overseas territories, this Government are completely committed to supporting the right of self-determination of the people of Gibraltar and of the Falklands?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who chairs the all-party group on Gibraltar. We unequivocally support the right of both Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands to self-determination. I was pleased to see the Chief Minister come out categorically and put down some of the false statements that were being made last week.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): The old principle that we used to apply was the Wilson principle—the principle of self-determination—which the Foreign Secretary may remember is the defence of the Falkland Islands and the defence of Gibraltar. He has now just violated that principle by undermining the rights of the Chagossian people in favour of a claim that was abandoned in 1965—it was never really made because it was only administrative, and the islands were never properly governed from Mauritius anyway—and by being in favour of a Court judgment that was advisory, he has sold out the sovereignty of the British people. Truly, nobody apart from a boy called Jack has ever made a worse deal on the way to market, and he has come back with a handful of beans that he is trying to sell as a prize.

Mr Lammy: I have to say that I have always admired the right hon. Gentleman's eloquence, but I have not always admired his principles. He was part of the last Government—

Tom Tugendhat: And I rejected it then.

Mr Lammy: Did the right hon. Gentleman raise this when he was part of the last Government, and did he make it a resignation issue? No, he did not, because he knows that we inherited this, and we had to make a deal.

Fred Thomas (Plymouth Moor View) (Lab): Can I begin by congratulating Conservative Members on their sudden interest in national security? They must have forgotten all about the millions and millions of Russian roubles swilling about in the party's bank accounts.

I do have a question for the Foreign Secretary, and I want to ask a question on behalf of my constituents in Plymouth and of the constituency of the Royal Marines community in the UK. The Falklands and Gibraltar represent something really personal and special to anyone who has served in the Navy or the Royal Marines. These are places that hold a real emotional weight: not only does it say "Gibraltar" across the Royal Marines cap badge, but it is written across our hearts. Can the Foreign Secretary please assure that constituency about what this Government's plans are for the Falklands Islands and Gibraltar?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue, and for his service and the seriousness with which he puts his remarks. I can give him that unequivocal assurance for the Falklands, for Gibraltar, for Cyprus and the rights that exist. The situation in the British Indian Ocean Territory is completely different and not comparable, and I regret that in a way this decision has been made against the backdrop of a Conservative leadership contest, and that colleagues who know a lot better have sought to make partisan points with something so important.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Did the Government take the trouble to consult the head of their own strategic defence review, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, before announcing this decision? If so, what did Lord Robertson say? The SDR is supposed to report early next year. Would it not have been more sensible to see what its findings were before taking a militarily risky decision such as this?

Mr Lammy: This deal secures the future of the base beyond the lifetime of anyone currently in this Parliament, and it can be extended. That is why the US Secretary of Defence has welcomed it. I would have thought that a former head of NATO of course welcomes this deal, because it secures the base and our national security, and the national security of the global community.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the vital operations on the base on Diego Garcia will remain completely unaltered and without disruption thanks to this agreement?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Absolutely, yes, I can.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): Over the past 210 years Chagossians have been traded, deprived of their liberty and of their dignity. They have been displaced from their homeland and now, thanks to this process, they face the prospect of being dispossessed

[*Dr Al Pinkerton*]

from their islands and from their future hope of self-determination. Chagossians are not children, and they do not require or ask for a trust fund. They are a proud community of many thousands of people who have been wronged time after time, and who today are looking to the Foreign Secretary, to the UK, and to Members of this House to ensure that their right to self-determination is understood and respected. Many of those Chagossians are outside right now. Can the right hon. Gentleman offer them that reassurance and think again on this negotiation?

Mr Lammy: The way that the Chagossians were treated was wrong, and this deal secures a right to settlement for them to the outer islands. The hon. Gentleman will know that there are a range of opinions among them, but he is absolutely right to put on record the manner in which they were treated, which I hope the whole House would accept is a matter of immense regret.

Elaine Stewart (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the threat of illegal migration on to Diego Garcia carried the threat of creating a further smuggling route into the UK, and has that threat now been shut down?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising a serious issue. On the signing of that treaty that is now a matter for Mauritius, and she is right to highlight that important issue in terms of our own national security.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I do not know how many people in the Chamber have visited these islands, but I went there with the Defence Committee 38 years ago. It was crucial in our whole effort in the cold war against the Soviet Union. We never appeased once in that cold war, and we won it. The question I want to ask—it is a serious question—is this: given that Mauritius has a close relationship with China, and given that we cannot trust a single word the Chinese say with our experience on Hong Kong, and given that they are militarising islands all over the Pacific, are we absolutely sure that sometime in the future the Chinese will not exert pressure on the Mauritian Government to have a base on these islands?

Mr Lammy: I have to say that such a senior Member of the House of Commons should just check his facts a little bit more closely. Mauritius is one of only two countries in Africa that has not participated in China's belt and road. Mauritius is an ally of India, not China.

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): This Government have committed to a reset of the UK's relationship with the global south. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that putting this issue to bed will help neutralise the charge that the UK plays by double standards where international law is concerned?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. Some would argue that the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of 2019 was only advisory and that the UN General Assembly resolution of 22 May 2019 was not binding, but he will recognise that many of our

closest allies voted against us on that occasion. It is important that we are a country that upholds the rule of law. I am called to come to this Dispatch Box to make the case for standing with Ukraine and for international humanitarian law. For all those reasons, we must be a country that upholds the rules-based order.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): We have just handed sovereign British territory to a small island nation that is an ally of China, and we are paying for the privilege, all so the Foreign Secretary can feel good about himself at his next north London dinner party. In whose interests does he think he serves: those of the global diplomatic elite or those of the British people and our national interest?

Mr Lammy: Well, I hope that question may have garnered the right hon. Gentleman a few more votes, but if that is his position, he is unlikely to lead the Conservative party to victory. This deal secures the base and it is in our national interests. That is why it is a good deal and it is why the President and the Defence Secretary of the United States applaud and welcome this deal. What do they know about global national security that he does not?

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): It is fairly unseemly, seeing a leadership race being conducted in the middle of a foreign policy debate—that is what is happening—but does the Secretary of State agree that clarity over the legal status of Diego Garcia, achieved through diplomacy with a Commonwealth partner, cements our influence in the Indo-Pacific?

Mr Lammy: I am hugely grateful to my hon. Friend, because the Commonwealth matters to those on the Government Benches. It used to matter to those on the Opposition Benches. As we head to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Samoa, it is hugely important that we are a country that plays by the rules. That is why this agreement is so important.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): I do not think it will come as a huge surprise to anyone that, unlike the outraged masses sat to my right, I have absolutely no problem with the principle of the United Kingdom divesting itself of what little remains of its colonial past. Can I ask the Minister about the involvement of the Chagossian people in this process—a people who he accepts have been treated shamefully by the United Kingdom and whose forced displacement is rightly regarded as a crime against humanity? Will he be clear about when his Government met the Chagossian people, the nature of the discussions that were had and the extent to which the opinion of the Chagossian people was represented in this deal?

Mr Lammy: As I have said, this deal will mean that, for the first time, Chagossians will be able to resettle on the outer islands. This was a negotiation between the United Kingdom Government and Mauritius; that was the nature of the state agreement. Of course, we sought to keep Chagossians informed, but I remind the hon. Gentleman—he knows this—that there are a range of Chagossian groups, with some in the Seychelles, some in Mauritius and some in this country.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): When the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly), was leading negotiations with Mauritius, he said:

“Our primary objective is to ensure the continued effective operation of our defence facility on Diego Garcia.”—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2023; Vol. 734, c. 151.]

This Government have now delivered that. On that basis, should the Conservatives not be welcoming the agreement?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is completely right, but she knows that the Conservatives have got a leadership contest on, and this is a bit of a beauty parade. That is why they are stepping away from a negotiation that they began, had 11 rounds on and failed to deliver on.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Having heard the Foreign Secretary’s performance this afternoon, we now know why the Government did not dare announce this in the House of Commons. This abject surrender of British sovereign territory for nothing—that is what it is—risks a Chinese veto over a vital military facility. May I ask the Foreign Secretary how much in rent this country will now pay Mauritius for the right to lease back what is already ours? Which Government Department—the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—will pay the landlord?

Mr Lammy: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned a Chinese veto. The Chinese do not have a veto in this House. The treaty will be scrutinised by this House. All Members will be able to look at it, debate it and reflect on it. Of course, at the time of publishing the treaty, there will be a discussion of the costs, but no basing agreements ever discuss costs, because that would damage our national security, and the Government are not prepared to do that.

Gordon McKee (Glasgow South) (Lab): Given that the previous Government began these negotiations, does the Foreign Secretary agree that while Opposition Members may now be more interested in the views of Tory party members, this Government will always act in Britain’s national interests?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is right. The Conservative party used to claim to be a party of defence. This is an agreement that secures our national defence and security interests in an important part of the globe, so it is shameful to see Opposition Members behaving as they are.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I just describe the right hon. Gentleman as hopelessly naive? Has he not seen how the rule of international law across the world is collapsing under the challenge from Russia, Iran, North Korea and China? Given a few flimsy pieces of paper, how much does he think that China or any of those other countries will respect it after we have given up the principle that this is British sovereign territory?

Mr Lammy: Up against a tough geopolitical environment in which Russia, Iran, North Korea and China are far from playing by the global rules, it is hugely important that this country is one that supports the rules-based order, and it is hugely important that this facility has been secured for longer than anybody else in this Parliament

was able to do. That is what we have secured. I trust the judgment of our closest ally, not that of the hon. Gentleman.

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): I welcome the fact that an agreement has been reached over the Chagos islands that helps to right a historic wrong and guarantees the security that we need. Among the confected outrage from the Opposition Benches we have heard the expected scaremongering over the future of other territories, including Gibraltar. Both the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) have in recent months reaffirmed the double lock on Gibraltar’s sovereignty, meaning not only that Gibraltarian sovereignty will never be altered without its people’s consent but that the UK Government will never enter into a process of negotiation with which the Gibraltarian people are not content. Does that remain the case?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. My hon. Friend the Minister of State communicated that with a letter to the Prime Minister just a few weeks ago. What we have seen in the last few days from the Opposition has been wholly irresponsible.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): The Foreign Secretary said he is establishing a trust fund and that Chagossians will be able to apply for British citizenship. What discussions did he have with the Chagossian people about that? Can he confirm that the Home Office is ready to deal with the applications?

Mr Lammy: They already can apply for UK citizenship. Of course we have been in dialogue and discussions with the Chagossians. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has met them regularly.

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this agreement has no bearing on the Government’s relationship with the other overseas territories and that the UK Government’s policy towards the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar and other territories remains unchanged, with support for their right to self-determination?

Mr Lammy: Self-determination is the key word, and we absolutely support the rights of the people of the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar in that regard.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Coming from Northern Ireland, I am not surprised that this Government have surrendered British interests against the wishes of the people who live there, because, after all, they supported the previous Government’s deal in relation to EU demands on Northern Ireland. The Government have given away a strategic interest. They have not published the deal. They will not reveal the cost. They will not guarantee that there will be no Chinese influence in this strategic area. They have handed this strategic interest to a country that has no historical claim. Does the Foreign Secretary not recognise the impact that this has on other people who are eyeing British territory—the EU in respect of Gibraltar and Argentina in respect of the Falklands? This is a dirty, dangerous and desperate deal. It is a shameful surrender of British interests. Is the Foreign Secretary relying on the fact that the

[Sammy Wilson]

Government have a huge, sledgehammer majority that can drive this through the House, despite its impact on long-term British interests?

Mr Lammy: I think the right hon. Gentleman lost much of the House when he said that the people live there—they do not; that is the whole point. This is a deal that will give them the right to resettlement on the outer islands. I do not recognise the right hon. Gentleman's caricature.

Steve Race (Exeter) (Lab): President Biden, Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin have welcomed the agreement. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Tory critics do not know more about US national security than the White House and the Pentagon?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He knows, as the whole House knows, that it does not matter who is in the White House or who is in No. 10: for generations, the US and the UK have acted in concert, and the future of Diego Garcia has been central to that. It has been central to the security of the Indo-Pacific and the wider Pacific, and central to global security. The capabilities across our nations are essential. That is why it is so sad to see the Conservative party not living up to where it should be on these crucial issues of national security, which ought not to be partisan.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): My old boss, Admiral Lord West of Spithead, won his Distinguished Service Cross in the Falklands in 1982. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, Lord West is a former Labour security Minister. Why does the right hon. Gentleman think that Lord West is of the view that what he is doing poses a grave security risk to this country and is likely to undermine our position in the Falkland Islands? Will he give a straight answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis), who asked whether Lord Robertson had been consulted in any way over the decision that the Foreign Secretary has made?

Mr Lammy: I urge the right hon. Gentleman to read the remarks of the Chief Minister of the Falkland Islands, and I urge him to consult more widely the defence establishment in this country, which is pleased that an issue that was looking as though it might become very contentious between us and the United States in terms of global national security has now been settled.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and particularly for the reassurances given to our brothers and sisters in Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. The scaremongering in respect of those two areas has been absolutely shameful. However, in the spirit of trying to achieve cross-party consensus, it is really important to acknowledge the work of the previous Government on this subject and how that has provided the foundation for what we have today. Before then, progress was all too slow, and it shamed our country. None the less, I want to give the Secretary the opportunity again to reassure us that this deal is in our strategic interest and also the interest of our partners.

Mr Lammy: There is seriousness behind my hon. Friend's question. I reassure him that the Defence Secretary and I have sought to secure a deal that secures the future of the base long after any of us in this Chamber are left. In particular, it ensures that China cannot locate on any of the other islands, as well as Diego Garcia. In truth, that is why the President, Defence Secretary and Secretary of State of the United States have welcomed this deal. It is also important to recognise that India has welcomed this deal—it does not want China in its backyard.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How does the cost of leasing compare with the savings that the Government are making on the winter fuel allowance?

Mr Lammy: The right hon. Gentleman will be able to return to these issues when the treaty is before the House. He must wait, as I do, for the Budget of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary will have a go at answering a direct question. How much will the UK have to pay for the privilege of ceding our sovereignty?

Mr Lammy: As I have said, these are issues that we can discuss when we have the treaty. It is not routine for any Government to comment on basing arrangements. The hon. Lady would not expect us to do that and put our national interests at stake.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that this Government's commitment to our populated British overseas territories is fundamental, unshakeable and unbreakable. I am glad to hear him make his statement, and I think this is a good thing for Britain.

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is right. There is an important distinction between the Indian ocean overseas territories and Diego Garcia, and Gibraltar and the Falklands, which are, of course, populated. The self-determination of those people is essential to their future, which is why the remarks that have been made over the past few days are wholly unacceptable and shameful.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): Will the Foreign Secretary take the opportunity to recognise that what happened to the Chagossian people in the 1960s and 1970s was abominable, abusive, illegal and disgraceful? Many of them lived in poverty for many years after in the Seychelles and Mauritius. They have long demanded their right to return to Diego Garcia and to the archipelago, which has been denied until now. It is right for the Foreign Secretary to pay tribute to those Chagossians who led that campaign for the right of return and resettlement on their home islands. An apology is due to the Chagossian people for the way they were treated.

Could I also ask the Foreign Secretary about the situation in Diego Garcia? It is unclear to me whether Chagossian people can visit, reside, stay or remain there, or whether they will be denied going there for another 140 years because of the deal done with the USA. Finally, why have the Americans been offered a 140-year lease as part of this deal? That is a very long time in recorded history of any sort, and longer than many countries have even existed. Can he explain that?

Mr Lammy: The right hon. Gentleman has championed the Chagossians in their plight for many years in this House. He makes his remarks with tremendous passion and strength, and he is right to do so. The way they were treated was wrong. I will have more to say on that when I bring forward the treaty in the months ahead. On whether they will now have a right to visit Diego Garcia, I must tell him that they will not under this treaty. Any resettlement or visits will be to the outer islands. This is an important US-UK security base, so I am unable to give him that assurance—they do not have that right under this treaty.

Mr Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I do not believe I ever had the pleasure of flying into our joint base on Diego Garcia, either in the US Air Force or as a pilot in our own Royal Air Force, but its strategic value in terms of the capabilities that it offers and the relationship it cements with our US partners is clear, as was its contested existence. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was a Tory Government that started the negotiations, because they recognised the dangerous situation facing the base, and that this Labour Government have now ensured that the base is undisputed and on a secure footing?

Mr Lammy: I thank my hon. Friend for his service. He is absolutely right to raise the issue of the islands being contested and this agreement putting them beyond contestation. That makes us all more secure as a result, as he knows because of his service. I think that most of the general public who have paid attention recognise that this is a deal that we in the United Kingdom can be proud of.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): After that performance from the Foreign Secretary, I am delighted to read that there will be reshuffle at Christmas. He should revisit his statement, as he said that my noble Friend Lord Cameron carried on the negotiations—I was his Parliamentary Private Secretary when he ended the negotiations; this Foreign Secretary capitulated in three weeks. Given the sham negotiation that he has carried out, can he assure me that no military equipment will be allowed to be stationed on not only the outer islands but the inner islands under this agreement over the 99 years? Can he outline to the House—he has not managed to outline much this afternoon—what scrutiny structures and how many votes we will be allowed in this House when he lays the treaty?

Mr Lammy: Yes to the hon. Gentleman's question. We will come forward with plans in due course.

Rupert Lowe (Great Yarmouth) (Reform): In the Foreign Secretary's oral statement he said:

"A binding judgment against the UK seemed inevitable".

That seems misleading verbal baby food at best. So far, there has been a non-binding advisory opinion and nothing to suggest that we will breach any form of international law. At a time of increasing global conflict, will the Foreign Secretary explain to the House why there is such urgency to do what he is proposing? It seems to be a case of acting in haste and repenting at leisure.

Mr Lammy: It was precisely to put the base on a secure footing, because of that global uncertainty, that this deal was the right deal.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I must say that I am surprised by Labour's conversion to the merits of leasehold rather than the security of freehold ownership—I did not think that was its position. In addition to being an unsinkable aircraft carrier, the British Indian Ocean Territory is host to unique space observation capabilities. It is the only remote monitoring place in the southern hemisphere that is able to see parts of the sky to which we would otherwise be blind. Space is a heavily contested military domain, so did the Foreign Secretary even know about these space monitoring capabilities? What are his plans to secure alternatives to save our freedom and security?

Mr Lammy: Foreign Secretaries do not comment on such capabilities, but the House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con): There is no dispute in the House that Diego Garcia is a vital strategic base in the heart of the British Indian Ocean Territory. Will the Foreign Secretary undertake, when he publishes the details of the treaty provisions, to include two things: first, the exclusion zone around Diego Garcia—how many miles—and secondly, provisions to prevent any other foreign power establishing a sovereign military base on any of the archipelagos of the British Indian Ocean Territory?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise these issues. He will be able to scrutinise provisions in that regard in the coming months.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): The Foreign Secretary has come to this House with the smile of a favourite, having exchanged British sovereign territory for a 99-year lease from a Chinese ally, and expects to be applauded for it. He claimed in his statement that we can extend the lease, but can he inform the House whether that right is unilateral and, if so, how many years will that extension be? Why does he think that this piece of paper will prevent Chinese encroachment?

Mr Lammy: As I have already said, this is not a Chinese ally; it is one of two countries that have not participated in China's belt and road in the continent of Africa, for a reason. It is an ally of India, not a Chinese ally, and it is hard to take the hon. Gentleman seriously if he cannot even get his facts right.

Stuart Anderson (South Shropshire) (Con): We have heard with great interest all these other countries that the Foreign Secretary is looking to please. I am interested in our country. I am interested in what goes on in this House. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that we will have a vote, and the mechanism by which that vote will come to this House, so that we can have a say on our sovereignty and what we own?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman is not new to this House. We will follow the usual processes, as he would expect.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): We saw a previous Labour Government sell off this country's gold. We now have a Labour Government who are surrendering our sovereignty and giving away our territory. Has the Foreign Secretary had any specific discussions with the Chagossian people as part of the negotiations?

Mr Lammy: I will not take lectures from a party that left a £22 billion black hole and our public services in a state. The chutzpah of the Opposition is unbelievable.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Those of us who have had the privilege of visiting some of the overseas territories or meeting their representatives here in Westminster are very much aware of their strong loyalty to and admiration for the United Kingdom. Even if they have heard what the Foreign Secretary said this afternoon, perhaps they are right to have a nagging doubt that that loyalty will not be returned, are they not?

Mr Lammy: Let me just say to the hon. Gentleman, because there is seriousness behind his question, that all of us believe in the right to self-determination. I am unequivocally, absolutely clear that the overseas territories remain an important part of our national story and nothing we have done in this deal puts them in any jeopardy.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): Given the exploitative response of Argentina in the context of the Falklands, is it not clear that those with malevolent aspirations about British territory are drawing comfort from the belief created by this deal that this Government are weak on the question of sovereignty? Does that not come off the back of the fact that Westminster, within the United Kingdom, surrendered sovereignty in over 300 areas of law in Northern Ireland to a foreign Parliament—namely, the European Parliament? If the Foreign Secretary wants to demonstrate that his assurances to Gibraltar and the Falklands are to be taken seriously, then should he not begin by reclaiming sovereignty over all of the United Kingdom and reverse the surrender of sovereignty in over 300 areas of law in Northern Ireland?

Mr Lammy: We will always defend the Falkland Islands. I raised that point with Argentina's Foreign Secretary just last week in New York.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): In the mid-1960s, when Mauritius was granted independence, it agreed, as part of that deal, to relinquish all claims to this British sovereign territory, which we have owned since the treaty of Paris in 1814. Why does the Foreign Secretary see fit to do a deal with a nation that has reneged on a previous deal, and why are we selling a sovereign asset that we all agree is of great value for no money up front? We are paying them. It is negligent.

Mr Lammy: Because we have done a deal that secures the security of the global community. I cannot recall if the hon. Gentleman is legally qualified, but I have to tell him that we found ourselves with no one supporting our claim in the family of the UN and the rules-based order. For that reason, the previous Government began the negotiations and it is absolutely right that we conclude them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Foreign Secretary has made a very clear point. In 1982 Margaret Thatcher set the precedent that the United Kingdom would do everything necessary to defend our overseas territories. Some 42 years later, it is important that that legacy is carried on. Will the Foreign Secretary commit to ensuring that this decision has no bearing on other overseas territories, such as the Falklands or Gibraltar? I have many friends who live in the Falklands and Gibraltar. What steps will be taken to protect and preserve them?

Mr Lammy: Yes, I can. In that regard, I want to associate myself with the remarks of the former Prime Minister and state once again that the right to self-determination governs our relationship with the overseas territories. They remain a very important part of our national story and nothing in this deal undermines that important relationship. That is why the Governor of the Falklands and Fabian Picardo in Gibraltar have been very clear about that in the past few days.

Dr Zubir Ahmed (Glasgow South West) (Lab) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I do not think the hon. Gentleman was standing throughout the statement.

Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Before we come to the next statement, may I reiterate the comments that Mr Speaker made earlier today? While the whole House understands that the business of government will go on during recess and that Ministers are required to respond to events, it is frustrating for hon. Members when statements are made during scheduled periods of recess, when the House is not sitting.

6.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I heard your statement, and Mr Speaker's earlier.

With permission, I would like to make a statement on the Government's carbon capture programme. Last week was a historic week for our energy system. On Monday, 142 years of coal-fired electricity generation came to an end, as Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station closed for the last time. I pay tribute to the generations of coal workers, at Ratcliffe and elsewhere, who powered our country for more than a century, and to power station workers; we owe them a huge debt. I am sure that sentiment is shared across the whole House. As one era ends and we begin the next stage of Britain's energy journey, the Government are determined to create a new generation of good jobs in our industrial heartlands. On Friday, we began a new era, as Government and industry agreed the deals that will launch Britain's carbon capture industry.

This has been a long time coming. I was proud, as Energy Secretary, to kick-start the process of developing carbon capture way back in 2009—some hon. Members were then still at school, and I am much greyer now—with a £1 billion competition. In 2011, that programme was cancelled by the coalition Government. In 2012, a new competition was announced, and in 2015, it too was cancelled. When we came to office, we inherited an in-principle aspiration to go ahead, but the very significant Government funding required had not yet been accounted for, so under the last Government we had fits and starts, dither and delay.

By contrast, just three months since we came to office, this Government have turned promise into reality. I can confirm to the House that we have agreed commercial terms, and £21.7 billion of funding over 25 years for five carbon capture, usage and storage projects across two clusters: HyNet in the north-west, and the East Coast Cluster in the north-east. This announcement will enable the construction of two transport and storage networks that will underpin this new industry. The highways for carbon capture and the deals we have agreed will also kick-start development of Net Zero Teesside, the world's largest gas with CCUS plant, and—these are both in Ellesmere Port—Protos, a new CCUS energy from waste facility, and EET Hydrogen, the UK's first large-scale blue hydrogen project, which is the cleanest in the world. They will crowd in £8 billion of private investment across the two clusters, creating 4,000 jobs in our industrial heartlands and building an initial capacity to remove over 8.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions each and every year. I pay tribute to the six new Labour MPs in Teesside and colleagues across the north-west who have been brilliant champions for those projects. This is just

the start; we will have more to say in the coming months about carbon capture sites in Humberside, Scotland and elsewhere around the country.

This investment is the right thing to do for Britain. CCUS will unlock the decarbonisation of hard-to-abate sectors, from chemicals to cement; enable the production of low-carbon hydrogen; and, by capturing emissions from gas-fired power stations, play an important role, alongside renewables and nuclear, in delivering clean power by 2030 and beyond. That is why experts in bodies ranging from the Climate Change Committee to the International Energy Agency are clear that carbon capture is critical to our meeting our climate commitments. There are those who doubt that. To them I quote James Richardson, the acting chief executive of the Climate Change Committee, who said on Friday quite simply:

"We can't hit the country's targets without CCUS".

The IEA, in a report from 2020 that I very much recommend to right hon. and hon. Members, said:

"Reaching net zero will be virtually impossible without CCUS",

pointing to "heavy industries" that

"account for almost 20% of global CO₂ emissions today".

To those who doubt whether the technology can work, I point out that it has been operating safely for decades in Norway and the US.

Last week's announcement puts the UK on the path to leading the world in deploying carbon capture at scale. Being an early mover in this technology offers huge economic and industrial benefits for Britain. The North sea means that we have the chance to lead; it gives us the capacity to store 200 years of our carbon emissions, has existing infrastructure that can be repurposed, and allows us to use the talents and experience of our highly skilled oil and gas workforce.

Over the last few years, around the world we have seen the race for the jobs and industries of the future accelerate. For too long, Britain has opted out and lost out. No longer. We will harness Britain's geology, know-how and expertise to be a world leader in this technology that will define the 21st century, building an industry that could support up to 50,000 jobs by the 2030s and using every tool at our disposal to seize the opportunities for Britain, with a proper industrial strategy and a commitment—which is absolutely crucial—to using public and private investment to build the future that our country deserves.

That is all part of the action of a Government who, in the last three months, have shown that we are in a hurry to deliver our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. We have lifted the onshore wind ban, consented to record amounts of nationally significant solar, launched Great British Energy, delivered the most successful renewables auction in British history, and set out our plans to lift more than a million households out of fuel poverty. We are moving apace, both because of the urgency of the challenges that we face and because of this Government's determination to win for Britain. Last week marked the end of one chapter in our country's energy story and the start of a new one—a new era showing that we can decarbonise and reindustrialise, a new era of clean energy jobs and investment in our industrial heartlands, and a new era of climate leadership. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

6.20 pm

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his statement. While I welcome the news today, I am saddened, if not surprised, that he has not had the grace to acknowledge the work of the last Government in getting us to this place. I know that his opinion is not that of the many partners who have come together to get this project over the line, and it does a huge disservice to his officials, who have worked so incredibly hard over the last couple of years to get us here. As far as I can see, the only positive investments that the Labour party seems to have made in its first 100 days—the Blackstone artificial intelligence data centre in Northumberland, the sixth assessment report and now this—were negotiated under the Conservatives. This is what the right hon. Gentleman's party has turned into reality: it has crashed business confidence, and overseen £666 million of assets from UK-focused equity funds fleeing the country. No wonder it has had to have a change of management.

In 2022, in the Energy Security Bill, we set out £1 billion of investment and the business models to support the CCUS market. Our aim was to have four industrial clusters by 2030. I must pay tribute to all who have worked together on those plans, including BP, Equinor, Eni, and all those involved with HyNet and the East Coast Cluster.

The brilliant Mayor of Tees Valley, Ben Houchen, has been a leading light in this regard for many years. I noted that the Secretary of State did not mention him, which was pretty graceless, but I am sure that he would like to welcome his work. I must also mention the former Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), who first announced Government support for carbon capture technology amounting to £20 billion last year. That, ultimately, was the breakthrough step that got us here.

The Secretary of State says that CCUS was not funded. Let me remind him of the extent to which he is resting his laurels on a set of draft policy statements for nuclear from back in 2009 that had no Treasury funding attached. I had agreement that at least £20 billion would be spent following the next spending review. The Secretary of State is a former Treasury spud, so he knows what that means. As always, it is the cheap politics that he reaches for. He is, I am afraid, the ultimate career politician. In fact, the funding that we had announced, which would run for 20 years, was about £200 million more per year than what he has set out today. Can he confirm that the projects have not been scaled back, and if they have been, will he tell us where the losses will be?

We have also had no word on the track 2 clusters, Acorn and Viking, on which we were due to make progress over the summer; they were conspicuously absent from the Secretary of State's statement. Many people will be deeply concerned, so can he update the House on those two projects? More widely, while his announcement rightly drew attention to the importance of British industry, both the TUC and the GMB have warned repeatedly about his net zero plans and what they will mean for British industry. In the words of

Gary Smith, the leader of the GMB, the Secretary of State's approach has been to export jobs and import virtue.

Let us look at what has happened on Labour's watch. At Grangemouth, 400 jobs are at risk, with nearly 3,000 potentially affected. At Port Talbot, 3,500 jobs are under threat, and at Scunthorpe, there is the potential for 2,500 job losses before Christmas. Moreover, Labour are putting 200,000 jobs at risk through their plans to ban new oil and gas licences and to make the UK regime the most punitive fiscal regime for the sector anywhere in the world. When will the Secretary of State publish an assessment of the impact that his plans for the North sea will have on jobs, and on investment in clean energy? After all, this carbon capture investment today would not be possible without Eni, Equinor and BP—companies using the stable finances of their oil and gas businesses to invest in clean energy.

The Secretary of State has talked about the importance of UK decarbonisation in tackling climate change, but will he acknowledge that his plans to target UK production will not mean that we use less? They will just leave us importing more from abroad—importing more oil and gas from the United States and the middle east, and importing more steel from China, which is still 60% powered by coal. Will he acknowledge that both those developments will actually increase global emissions? It would be carbon accounting gone mad. It might leave some in the green lobby cheering at our reduced emissions, but overall there would be more carbon in the atmosphere and fewer jobs here in Britain. Is the Labour party seriously going to be responsible for the end of steelmaking in the UK, with the added cost of the loss of more than 10,000 jobs in our most left-behind communities? The Secretary of State must acknowledge that a better balance has to be found.

The Secretary of State has still made no comment on, and no apology for, promising the British public at the general election savings of £300 on their energy bills by 2030. Will he finally give an answer to his Back Benchers, the House and all our constituents, and explain what has happened to that pledge?

Ed Miliband: I know that the right hon. Lady is in a difficult position, and it rather showed today. Let us be honest: the truth is quite painful for her. She failed, as Energy Secretary, to get carbon capture over the line, year after year—well, to be fair, she was only in the job for 10 months, but certainly month after month. The funding was never secured, because there was not the political will from the Chancellor or the Prime Minister. We have seen a long line of 20 Energy Secretaries and 14 years of failure. I must give the right hon. Lady her due: she did try, I am sure; but there was nothing but dither and delay. When we came to office, the funding had not been accounted for as part of a spending review; it simply was not there. There was just a vague promise. Now it is quite difficult for the right hon. Lady, and perhaps we should have a little sympathy for her, because she has had to come to the House and see what a Government actually delivering looks like.

Let me deal with the right hon. Lady's questions in turn. She had the brass neck to suggest that the problems at Grangemouth and Port Talbot were somehow due to the negligence of this Government. Let me tell the House about Grangemouth. I came to office with the

closure of Grangemouth already announced and likely to happen. I have probably had more conversations with my counterpart in the Scottish Government than Tory Ministers had in 10 years, because they just were not interested. We should be extremely angry about that. So what did we do? We funded the Willow project, which the Tories did not fund. We added to the growth deal, which they did not do. We said that we would have a national wealth fund with the potential to fund Project Willow. We had none of that from the right hon. Lady. She just was not interested. She just did not care; that is the truth of the matter. Of course it is ideological, rather than accidental. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is. A bit of honesty from the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie)! I noted that he was very honest about the right hon. Lady at the party conference. The truth is that the Tories did not have an industrial strategy because they do not believe in an industrial strategy.

Let me deal with the rest of the right hon. Lady's nonsense. I am very pleased that she is interested in Gary Smith, because he has said:

"This is a serious step in the right direction and a welcome investment in jobs and industries after years of neglect under the previous administration."

That is the reality. As for the other stuff that the right hon. Lady said, I think that she has a decision to make. She began her political career in the Conservative Environment Network, and she has ended up backing a net zero sceptic for the Tory leadership. I think it is a little bit sad. She should take some time to reflect on that, and on the utter contrast between her failure and this Government's delivery.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Unlike the shadow Secretary of State, I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has announced jobs in Teesside—jobs from which my constituents in the north-west of England will potentially benefit. I am also very pleased that we have a Government who are committed to an industrial strategy, and who believe in Government working in partnership with business.

The Secretary of State mentioned just how important it is that we have this technology if we are to decarbonise; he quoted James Richardson in making the case. It will be crucial for the abatement of heavy industries such as chemicals, glass—the Secretary of State went to visit a glass factory in the north-west on Friday—and cement, but it will also be crucial for hydrogen production, for the new gas-fired power stations and, indeed, for converting waste into energy. How long does he think we will need this technology for the abatement of heavy industry, and how long does he think we will need it for hydrogen production and production from gas?

Ed Miliband: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; he makes a really important point. Some people are sceptical about the use of carbon capture and storage. The truth is that for hard-to-abate industries—cement, for example—unless we have CCS technology, either there will be no future for these industries or they will not be able to decarbonise. Yes, it is an investment, but it is absolutely crucial, and I am struck by what the

IEA said. We are talking about probably 20% of industry, and we are doing the right thing for Britain and setting an example to the world.

I always say on these occasions that, when it comes to blue hydrogen and gas with CCUS, we need all the technologies at our disposal on this decarbonisation journey. It is going to be a primarily renewables-based system, but nuclear has an important role and we need dispatchable decarbonised or low-carbon generation as well. All these things have a role, and the pathway will become clearer over time, but this issue is so urgent that I want to have all the technologies at our disposal.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Lib Deb spokesperson.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. The Liberal Democrats are committed to supporting British industries in cutting carbon emissions and getting the country back on track towards meeting our climate targets. It cannot be emphasised enough how significant it is that this announcement comes at the same time as we hear about the UK being the first industrial nation to close its last coal-fired power plant. We had been dependent on coal for 150 years, so that is absolutely key.

It is clear that the future lies with renewables and clean energy, where we need to bring urgency and the necessary scale of investment. The Conservative Government's irresponsible roll-back from key climate pledges, and their failure to invest properly in renewable energy and home insulation, has left thousands of households vulnerable to fuel poverty as another winter approaches. The failure to move forward at pace in decarbonising our industries, our transport and our homes has left us needing to take difficult decisions. We support the need, recognised by the Climate Change Committee, for at-scale, long-term investment in CCS, particularly for hard-to-decarbonise industries such as chemicals, cement and steel manufacturing. We would like to see investment in existing industries, and we want it to meet environmental requirements.

While we are discussing history, I should mention that it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) who launched carbon capture and storage, which was yet again cancelled by the Conservatives. However, although carbon capture and storage is a key tool in reaching net zero, it is also very expensive and complex, and evidence of its efficacy is still scant. Understandably, as the Secretary of State mentioned, there is much concern about the focus on incentivising industries to invest in CCS as an alternative to radically reducing their emissions. Therefore, it is important that the Government set out clearly and transparently the path to delivery for any CCS they invest in and show the milestones for progress. What will the Secretary of State do to increase investment—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the Secretary of State.

Ed Miliband: May I begin by welcoming the hon. Lady to her place, and thanking her for the tone and substance of her remarks? She is right to underline the fact that we are marking a new era but also marking the passing of an era, and it is right to pay tribute to all

[Ed Miliband]

the people who worked in our coal-fired power stations and, indeed, who worked underground to dig coal for our country. It is a big moment of change and the passing of an era.

On the hon. Lady's broad points about CCS, my philosophy is that we want zero-carbon power where possible, but we also need carbon capture, particularly for hard-to-abate sectors and so that we can have not unabated gas, but gas with CCS or hydrogen power. She raises the question of cost. Imagine if we had had this conversation 15 years ago, when I was Secretary of State and much younger—15 years younger, to be precise. [Interruption.] Yes, I am good at maths. Some people were saying at the time, "Why are you subsidising offshore wind? It can never be competitive with fossil fuels." Now, it is among the cheapest technologies to build and operate. That is what deployment does for us, and that is what the combination of public and private sectors working together does for us. Yes, there is an investment here, but a far-sighted, forward-looking Government have to make such investments, and I welcome the hon. Lady's support.

Barry Gardiner (Brent West) (Lab): I had rather hoped that my right hon. Friend was going to start his statement by saying, "As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted—". I have waited so long to hear a Secretary of State make such announcements from the Dispatch Box, and I am delighted. However, my right hon. Friend knows that carbon capture technologies reduce the energy intensity of fossil fuels by up to 25%, which makes such electricity much more expensive than that produced from renewables. Can the Secretary of State confirm that CCUS will be used not simply to allow the continued extraction of fossil fuel for our power sector, but only for the hardest-to-abate heavy industries and for the production of green hydrogen, thereby keeping domestic fuel bills low and delivering on this Government's commitment to decarbonise our power sector by 2030 through much cheaper renewables and nuclear, not more expensive gas with CCUS? Finally, may I caution him against swallowing too much of the hype around blue hydrogen?

Ed Miliband: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; he speaks with great knowledge and expertise on these issues. He is absolutely right about the hard-to-abate sectors. I say to him what I said to the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson): there is a role for both blue hydrogen and gas with CCUS, but that is within the context of a primarily renewables-based system that uses nuclear as well. It goes back to the point about needing all the technologies at our disposal if we are to surmount the challenges we face.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Humber area produces the most emissions in the country, and it is vital that we make progress in that region. Some £15 billion-worth of private investment stands ready. The Secretary of State mentioned that there will be a further announcement in the coming months. Could he perhaps advance that as quickly as possible in order that we can take our first steps towards reaching our targets?

Ed Miliband: Let me say to the hon. Gentleman that this is a point of agreement between us. These are very important projects, and I thank him for his question. They were always envisaged as being two tracks, and we inherited a significant degree of delay from the last Government. We want these projects to happen as soon as possible and, as I said in my statement, this is something that we will address in the months ahead.

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): I was happy to hear the Secretary of State's words last week when he said that industries should not die, and the Government investment in Merseyside and Teesside is most welcome. Can he commit to the same level of bold and transformative Government action to retain the Grangemouth refinery workers' jobs, as they face the prospect of redundancies and their industry dying?

Ed Miliband: This is something that my hon. Friend and I have talked about. On Grangemouth, we are advancing at speed—in a way that the last Government completely failed to do, because the project had not even started—with Project Willow, which is seeking an industrial future for the Grangemouth site. He has my absolute commitment that we will use every lever at our disposal in Government to try and make this happen. We have a number of levers available to us that the last Government did not have, including the national wealth fund, and we are going to work intensively on that in the coming months.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that until a few days ago, the Fawley refinery and chemicals complex run by ExxonMobil in New Forest East was planning a major carbon capture project that involved controversial pipelines either over sensitive areas of the New Forest or across the Isle of Wight. ExxonMobil has temporarily pulled the plug on that, but one reason it seems to think it cannot use a sea route, perhaps to feed this in to the North sea outlet for carbon capture and storage, is the absence of purpose-built ships for the safe transportation of liquefied CO₂. Will the Secretary of State look into where we are with the development of safe methods of transporting the gas in liquid form by sea?

Ed Miliband: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I talked to the UK chair of ExxonMobil last week about this issue, and I believe that the Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon West (Sarah Jones), is going to meet him later this week. For the benefit of the House, this was not in either track 1 or track 2—it was part of the Solent cluster—but we want all the projects to go ahead and the Solent cluster has real potential and is an important part of this. The UK chair told me that this temporary pause was certainly nothing to do with the actions of this Government, but, frankly, was to do with the time it had taken the previous Government to get going on this. I undertake to the right hon. Gentleman that we will continue our dialogue with the company about these issues, including on the more technical issues that he is talking about.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): This announcement is fantastic news for the north-east and for the country. It will place us at the

forefront of a critical and growing sector, it will help to re-industrialise regions that have been de-industrialised by successive Conservative Governments and it will deliver thousands of well-paid jobs—jobs that people can raise a family on. For the benefit of those with genuine concerns about the feasibility of this technology—as opposed to those playing party politics with innovation or those ideologically opposed to industry—will my right hon. Friend say a little more about the world-leading research and innovation that will carry on alongside this deployment, and particularly about the carbon storage research facility and the work that it will do?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge of this subject. She is unusual in this House, in that she is an engineer by background and actually knows about these issues. She is absolutely right about this. Our world-leading scientists and engineers are a crucial part of our playing a world-leading role in this technology. I also say to those who are worried about the risk of this technology that the much, much greater risk is in not acting. The risk before us is the climate crisis that grows every day, and it is the right thing to do to get CCS moving.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I welcome what the Secretary of State said about there being more news to come about Scotland, because the Acorn project is not a track 1 project; it is a track 2 project. The previous Prime Minister visited Peterhead and raised hopes that there might be investment coming there, but then nothing. The Secretary of State also spoke about the great skills that we have in oil engineering. There is possibly nowhere else in Europe, and perhaps the world, that has more of those skills than the north-east of Scotland, so can he tell us how committed the Government are to bringing forward Acorn as quickly as possible?

Ed Miliband: I concur completely with what the hon. Lady says. We are absolutely committed to Acorn; it is very important. We came into Government with track 1 not accounted for, so part of the challenge was getting track 1 over the line because it just seemed so important to send a signal that there was not going to be more of the dither and delay that we had seen. I can absolutely assure her and other Scottish colleagues across the House that this is of fundamental importance to us. It is of fundamental importance for Scotland but also for the whole of the United Kingdom, because we will not be able to surmount the challenges we face simply with track 1 projects.

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today. Could he say a bit more about how this important project will sit alongside other investments in green energy as we move towards the 2030 and 2050 targets? Could he also explain more about the potential for job creation across the country in a wide range of industries and regions?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is entirely right. This is part of a whole set of things this Government are doing, including lifting the onshore wind ban, releasing private investment and dealing with solar projects that had frankly been sitting on desks for far too long, with nearly 2 GW consented. In fact, more has been consented in nationally consented projects in three months of this

Government than in 14 years of the last Government. Doesn't that tell a story about dither, delay and inaction? So my hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is part of a whole series of investments, both private and public, that this Government are unleashing and putting in.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): I am pleased that there is an announcement on the funding of blue hydrogen at Ellesmere Port, but what about Bacton, the gas terminal in north Norfolk? What are the Secretary of State's plans to support blue hydrogen projects at Bacton, which would be ideally suited for the southern North sea? Also, having looked at the numbers, which seem a bit light, could he please confirm that it is still Government policy that we should capture and store between 20 and 30 megatons of CO₂ by 2030?

Ed Miliband: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, that is very much part of our plans for the future. On his second point, we will obviously set out all those details in response to the work of the Climate Change Committee. Frankly, one thing that we are struggling with is the delays under the last Government. I have set out the impact of this project and will be setting out the impact of future projects when they are announced.

Lola McEvoy (Darlington) (Lab): May I put on record my thanks to the Secretary of State and his wider team, who have decided in such difficult economic times to invest in my part of the country? This marks a huge vote of confidence in our local industry leaders and our fantastic regional workforce, and as he said, it has been a long time coming. Does he agree that this carbon capture project will create exciting, skilled jobs and opportunities for people in Darlington and the Tees valley, solidifying a green industrial future for my constituency?

Ed Miliband: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and for her brilliant advocacy on this issue. She raises an important point, which is that people will look at this investment and think that it is a big investment, albeit over 25 years. Is it the right thing to do for the country? Emphatically, yes. It is right for our industries and for the industries of the future, because the transport and storage networks are absolutely crucial, not just for the specific projects I have announced but for future projects, for our security as a country and for jobs in our industrial heartland. I thank her for her advocacy and we will keep moving forward on this.

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): The Secretary of State says he is absolutely committed to the Acorn project. Well, the way to show that would be to fund it, because yet again the UK Government have failed to announce funding for carbon capture utilisation and storage projects in Scotland. This is a disaster economically, industrially and environmentally. I am sure he will agree that without Acorn, the UK cannot meet its net zero targets and will miss them by some margin. The last Tory Government failed to back this project in Scotland for years, and despite offering change, Labour has done exactly the same thing, following the same path with broadly the same budget and prioritising less developed, less substantial and less deliverable projects in England while offering the Scottish cluster no funding at all to date. People in Scotland remember well how

[Dave Doogan]

eager the Treasury and the Westminster Government were to get their hands on revenues from North sea oil and gas. When will we see that returned with investment from Westminster into the north-east of Scotland to support the Acorn project?

Ed Miliband: I am sorry about the hon. Gentleman's tone, but it is entirely predictable. He knows that there have always been two tracks. This Government have moved at speed to fund track 1, and I have made absolutely clear our commitment to Acorn and track 2.

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of major investment in carbon capture in our industrial heartlands, including in Merseyside. Knowsley hosts significant industrial capacity and has huge potential to contribute to this. Can the Secretary of State provide details and meet me to discuss how Knowsley will benefit from investment in the thousands of good, secure jobs expected under this scheme?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The challenge for the Government, and for the companies that have won these contracts, is to make sure that we create jobs in the supply chain, including in her constituency. I look forward to meeting her to discuss this.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Waste incinerators release, on average, a tonne of CO₂ for every tonne of waste incinerated. They are usually called "energy from waste" but their environmental value is questionable unless carbon capture is attached. Yes, we need to recycle more, but energy from waste will be with us for years to come. Will the Secretary of State commit to significantly scaling up carbon capture for energy from waste plants?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and it is why one of the projects we funded is an energy from waste project. This is exactly the kind of role that CCS can play.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's engagement on this issue. Labour Members from across the Tees valley, especially our friend Alex Cunningham, have been pressing for many years to secure carbon capture, utilisation and storage. Given the dithering of the Conservative party, we had become increasingly anxious that the final investment decisions would not be aligned and that the opportunity to invest in this critical project would be lost. It is a testament to this Labour Government that it has been delivered so early after entering office. So that we can use this precious investment, will my right hon. Friend, along with his Business and Trade and Education colleagues, meet hon. Members from across the Tees valley to discuss how we can secure the well-paid jobs, apprenticeships and training that we need?

Ed Miliband: I pay tribute to Alex Cunningham and my hon. Friend for being tireless advocates. He makes such an important point. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), we must ensure that the jobs we are delivering get to the people and places that have not seen such opportunities for far

too long. I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) to discuss this further.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Given the Chancellor's rhetoric about black holes, it is perhaps a little surprising that the Government have managed to magic £22 billion for this, but I wish the Secretary of State well. I hope his plan works. Does he share my concern that, in doing this, we will reduce the drive to decarbonise industries, just as the use of waste incinerators has reduced the imperative to reduce, reuse and recycle waste, including in Westbury in my constituency?

Ed Miliband: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's question, although I do not agree. First, this is a long-term investment in the country's future, and I think the Chancellor is far-sighted in recognising its importance. Secondly, there are hard-to-abate industries that, without carbon capture, will find it very hard to enter a decarbonised world. We have to protect those industries, but I agree that, where industries can decarbonise without CCS, of course we want them to do so.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, and I congratulate the trade unions, communities and campaigners that have campaigned for this for so long. His leadership stands in stark contrast with the asset-stripping of jobs, hopes and investment that we have seen in too many of our industrial heartlands. Does he agree that carbon capture is about not just net zero or boosting cluster areas, but boosting jobs, skills and futures in the supply chain in communities such as mine in Peterborough and across the country?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend always speaks with great eloquence on these issues, and he is completely right. When we talk about the transition to clean energy creating the jobs of the future, and about it being the greatest economic opportunity of the 21st century, we have to show that it can actually happen. The problem with the last Government is that, although they used that rhetoric at times, they never actually delivered. Today, we are showing the difference.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): As the Secretary of State will be aware, the vast majority of carbon capture and storage pilot and demonstration projects that have been commissioned worldwide have been cancelled or put on hold. I am concerned that the Government are putting so much money—£22 billion—into an unproven technology. I understand that the track 1 projects are about new gas power stations and blue hydrogen, about which the hon. Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner) has already expressed concern because they are fossil fuel technologies. Will the Secretary of State rule out investing any of this £22 billion in new fossil fuels, locking the UK into new fossil fuel production? Will he instead consider a major scaling up of natural carbon capture through major investment in the restoration of woodlands, peatlands and wetlands?

Ed Miliband: It is early, but I worry about the hon. Gentleman's opposition to new grid infrastructure, so goodness knows what will happen to the renewables. He also opposes carbon capture, so goodness knows what

will happen to the hard-to-abate industries. I am all in favour of investing in woodlands, but we need all of these things. I want to be generous to the Green party—*[Interruption.]* I am a generous person, and I am sure the Green party has the best of intentions, but the scale of the transition means this country needs all of these technologies. It is not about choosing to invest in the woodlands and not investing in grid infrastructure or CCS. I urge the hon. Gentleman to think about this, because we need all of these technologies.

Henry Tufnell (Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab): I welcome the Government's announcement on moving forward with the track 1 projects, which will create thousands of well-paid jobs, attract inward investment and accelerate us towards net zero. With the closure of the blast furnace at Port Talbot, the two largest carbon emitters in Wales are now in my Mid and South Pembrokeshire constituency, but they have no access to pipeline CO₂ transport. What measures is the Secretary of State taking to encourage the decarbonisation of sites such as those in Pembrokeshire, which rely on non-pipeline solutions for CO₂ transport, to achieve a just transition?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend also speaks with customary eloquence on these issues. This is potentially an important part of the solution. We owe a debt to the workers at Port Talbot, and we must ensure that we leave no stone unturned in looking to the future. I look forward to continuing these discussions with him.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Secretary of State has boasted about spending £27 billion of public money on carbon capture and storage, and on promoting what he calls renewable energy. Does he feel any sense of irony in taking £27 billion from a financial black hole and putting it into a carbon-absorbing black hole? Does he not recognise that his own green policies are generating the very CO₂ he condemns? The Drax B power station needs American forests to be chopped down and brought halfway around the world to be burned, emitting CO₂, at a cost of £1 billion a year in subsidy.

In Northern Ireland, we are tearing up thousands of acres of pristine upland bogland to erect windmills, and Scotland has already cut down 17 million carbon-absorbing trees to make space for windmills. I know the Secretary of State is keen on modelling, but have his models told him how many carbon capture and storage facilities will be needed to offset the carbon impact of his green policies?

Ed Miliband: I will let the House into a secret: the conversation—if I can put it that way—between myself and the right hon. Gentleman goes back to 2008 or 2009, when he was shadowing me, so this is a long-running saga, and I fear I will not convince him. I disagree with him on so many levels that it is hard to listen. I respect his point of view, but I think we will not agree.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): This Government have shown in the last three months what can be achieved by rejecting the climate denialism that the last Government often seemed at risk of sliding into. However, this announcement is important because it underlines the opportunity we have to also reject climate delivery denialism—the idea that we can somehow make the

transition to net zero work without making big, bold investments or by focusing only on narrow solutions that align with our ideological priorities. The International Energy Agency and the Climate Change Committee could not be clearer: CCUS is not just an economic opportunity for this country, but a scientific necessity if we are to meet our climate targets. Will the Secretary of State therefore leave no stone unturned and no opportunity off the table, doing everything we can not just to deliver on our targets, but to ensure that we make the most of the opportunity to reindustrialise parts of this country that have been neglected for far too long?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend makes such an important point. I was with the Prime Minister in New York in the last couple of weeks, talking to international partners about where the new British Government stood, and there is a sense that British leadership is back. However, if I had said to them, “We can't do carbon capture; that's just not an answer,” they would have said, “Well, what are we going to do about our industries?” My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to have all the solutions at our disposal, both for British leadership and for global decarbonisation.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): The Secretary of State will know that it is vital that we reduce our global greenhouse gas emissions if we are to avoid the worst ravages of a climate crisis that is already manifesting. Given that this deal risks incentivising hard-to-abate businesses to continue with business as usual, will he outline what steps the Government intend to take to ensure that those industries also invest in reducing their emissions?

Ed Miliband: I welcome the hon. Member to the House. We have all kinds of projects in place to encourage business to decarbonise; indeed, our drive for clean power by 2030 is part of ensuring that we decarbonise the electricity system to help businesses to be part of the decarbonisation journey. However, I just do not recognise the picture that he paints—that this proposal is somehow a disincentive for companies. I hear lots of businesses asking how they are going to exist, frankly, in a decarbonised world. What is the answer, for example, for the cement industry in a decarbonised world? That is why CCS is so vital.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): I am so pleased to be part of a new era of clean energy investment, with carbon capture in the north-east and the very successful recent renewables auction. The Secretary of State has been to see our critical minerals, floating offshore wind potential and geothermal potential in Cornwall. Will he please confirm that the industrial strategy and renewables will be truly UK-wide and will span from Scotland and the north-east down to the west and Cornwall, with a clear pipeline of investment opportunities in order to give certainty to developers in, for example, floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I have said before in the House, Cornwall has a crucial role to play in our clean energy future. She is a brilliant champion for Cornwall and for floating wind. As she says, there is huge opportunity, and we look forward to working with her to make it happen.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State's enthusiasm for decarbonisation and carbon capture, particularly in heavy industry, including cement. However, the track 1 projects include new gas power stations and new blue hydrogen, which will carry a huge greenhouse gas penalty caused by upstream methane emissions. Will the Secretary of State therefore commit to reviewing the full-lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions for any project before it goes to a full investment decision?

Ed Miliband: That is indeed done as part of this. I gently say to some of those asking me this question that this Government have a world-leading position on no new oil and gas licences, and that position is recognised around the world. I say to the hon. Member—this goes back to what I have said throughout this statement—that we need everything as part of the mix. That is why we are going to keep existing fields in the North sea open for their lifespan—for decades to come—and that is part of the energy mix. Of course we are going to move off oil and gas; indeed, we have a science-based position on this issue, unlike the last Government. But this does need to be a transition, and that is what we are going to make happen.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I strongly welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's commitment to delivering for Teesside and to delivering thousands of good green jobs in clean industries—delivery after years of delay. He mentioned Solent earlier, and he knows the risk that delay can pose to CCUS and to jobs. Does he therefore agree that it is absurd for the Conservative party to try to claim credit for this proposal after failing to deliver for 14 years, failing to commit any resources and leaving our industries in the lurch?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The last Government cancelled the project twice, which tells us all we need to know about them. I had forgotten about the second cancellation; I actually had to check—I could not believe that they had cancelled it not just once but twice. That is going some. After three months, here is the reality: they talked, we acted.

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that investment in these CCUS projects would not be possible without the private investment generated from our oil and gas companies. In the light of that, of him again confirming his policy on no new licences and of other policies that are set to close down the North sea, how will he ensure that that private investment continues so that more CCUS projects come forward in the future?

Ed Miliband: I listened to what oil and gas companies such as BP and Equinor said: they warmly welcomed this announcement. Frankly, there was a sigh of relief; after years of promises and delay, we finally had a Government getting this done.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Ten million pensioners will find it utterly extraordinary that this Government can find over £20 billion when they cannot find £1 billion to fund the winter fuel payment. That is £20 billion to invest in what the Secretary of

State has today admitted is a risky technology—I find myself in the rare position of agreeing with the co-leader of the Green party, the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay), on that. The extraordinary thing is that this is almost £1,000 per household. Will this sum of taxpayers' money be added to general taxation, when taxes are already at record highs, or will it be added to our energy bills, which the Secretary of State has promised will be brought down?

Ed Miliband: Let us be absolutely clear about this, because that was a significant intervention from the hon. Gentleman. Here we have what claims to be the party of working people opposing jobs for working people right across the country. That says all we need to know about the hon. Gentleman: outside this House, he pretends to be in favour of good industrial jobs for Britain; in this House, he opposes them.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I welcome the announcement that has been made, but the Acorn project in St Fergus, between Fraserburgh and Peterhead in my constituency, has been waiting for years, following a promise of jam tomorrow from the last lot. Opposition colleagues have asked for a definitive statement regarding progress on the project. I know that it is a track 2 project, but I am deeply impressed by the extent to which the Secretary of State is prepared to move things forward rapidly, so can he please give us some sort of timescale for the Acorn project today?

Ed Miliband: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tone of his question. I do understand that, just as track 1 was led a merry dance by the last Government, so too was track 2. The current Government have been in power for three months. We are moving at speed, and we have got track 1 over the line. These are obviously decisions that the Chancellor will have to make in the spending review, for reasons the hon. Gentleman will understand. I just say to him that we are absolutely committed to track 2, including Acorn.

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but carbon capture can be done in a number of ways. Anaerobic digestion plants, for example, produce as much CO₂ as methane, which can be ducted into greenhouses to produce bigger tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuces. Will such natural carbon capture be included in the project, thereby helping to enhance our food security?

Ed Miliband: I am all in favour of big tomatoes and improving our food security. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the potential uses of CCUS. On Friday, we were at a glass factory that will be using hydrogen from a new project and will be the beneficiary of a decarbonised supply. I look forward to further discussions with the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): And the final word goes to Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Maybe not the final word, Madam Deputy Speaker, as that will be for the Secretary of State. I welcome the statement, in which he rightly underlined that anybody who ignores carbon capture, use and storage does so at their peril, and the

Government's commitment to carbon capture. While the amount set aside is incredible, so too is the requirement that every penny brings an achievement. How will the Secretary of State ensure that each region of the United Kingdom is involved in this net gain? I say to him gently that Northern Ireland is not mentioned in his statement; I am sure he will address that issue. There must be accountability to ensure the realisation of environmental goals, rather than simply the aspiration of achieving them.

Ed Miliband: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I hope he has a conversation with his right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson)—*[Interruption.]* I see the right hon. Member does not want to talk to him right now. A good point to end on is the fact that, of course, jobs will be created in certain parts of the United Kingdom, but the measures announced will benefit supply chains across the whole United Kingdom. This Government look forward to ensuring that happens.

NHS Performance: Darzi Investigation

7.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Lord Darzi's independent investigation into NHS performance.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to open this debate on Lord Darzi's investigation into the national health service, not just so that we can debate the past and what went so badly wrong, but so that the House can also debate the future of our NHS, how it needs to change and the many reasons to be optimistic about what our health service can be.

We have to start with honesty. For too long, Conservative Governments swept problems under the carpet, more interested in scapegoats than solutions. *[Interruption.]* I know; it is terrible. That is why I asked Lord Darzi to conduct an independent investigation into our national health service. He is an eminent cancer surgeon, with 30 years' experience in the NHS, yet what he found shocked even him: some 100,000 toddlers and babies were left waiting for six hours in A&E last year; more than one in 10 hospital beds are taken up by patients who do not need to be there; children are less healthy today than they were a decade ago; adults are living longer but getting sicker sooner; conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure are rising relentlessly; mortality from preventable causes is far higher than in other advanced countries; almost 3 million people are off work sick; and waiting lists are at record highs while patient satisfaction is at a record low.

The fundamental promise of the NHS—that it will be there for us when we need it—has been broken for a decade. Why? Because of four knock-out blows. First, a decade of under-investment means NHS staff are forced to use pagers and fax machines, with fewer cancer scanners than Greece and buildings literally crumbling. That is not to mention the disgrace that the previous Government's new hospitals programme was written according to fictitious timetables, with the funding running out this coming March.

Secondly, there was Andrew Lansley's disastrous 2012 top-down reorganisation that nobody voted for, cost billions and took years. It was an enormous waste of time, talent and money that should have been spent on caring for patients.

Thirdly, there was a failure to reform. The reforms made by the last Labour Government, which delivered the shortest waiting times and highest patient satisfaction in history, were ditched—a golden inheritance squandered.

Fourthly, there was coronavirus. Lord Darzi found that the NHS was hit harder than any other comparable healthcare system because of the damage the Tories had already done. It is not just that they did not fix the roof when the sun was shining; they doused the house in petrol, left the gas on and covid just lit the match. That is why millions are stuck on waiting lists, ambulances do not arrive on time and people cannot see their GP. Never forgive, never forget and never let the Tories do it again.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Lord Darzi's report was utterly damning about the treatment of children in our health system. He said that too many children were being let down, and pointed out that they

[Munira Wilson]

account for 24% of the population, but only 11% of NHS expenditure, and that over 100,000 children wait for over a year to be assessed for mental health treatment. He said we must do better, so will the Secretary of State commit to putting children front and centre of the 10-year plan, and to making them a priority, because for a decade, the Tories let our children down?

Wes Streeting: I strongly agree with the hon. Member. I will talk about the 10-year plan shortly, but I can guarantee that children and paediatric care will be front and centre of that plan. We can do much more to shine a spotlight on paediatric waiting lists, as well as doing much more in practice. She mentioned children and young people's mental health, on which our parties strongly agree. We will deliver our manifesto commitment to put mental health support in every primary and secondary school in the country, as well as providing walk-in services in every community, so that young people receive the mental health and wellbeing support that they need and do not get to the crisis point reached by far too many of our children.

The hon. Member's intervention is an example of why I am looking forward to the debate. I hope to listen to contributions and to challenge from all sides of the House. Before I take any interventions from Conservative Members, I advise them that if they want to get a hearing on the NHS ever again, then the first word that should pass their lips is, "Sorry". Only last week, at the Conservative party conference, we did not see a single shred of remorse or contrition for their appalling record. Indeed, when it comes to the shadow Secretary of State and her party, it seems that sorry is the hardest word.

The NHS is broken. NHS staff do not want to accept that, but it is. According to YouGov, that is what the vast majority of patients say. It is also what staff tell me every time I am on the frontline, but I understand why some people find the word difficult. In the past few weeks, I have met some of the NHS team who happened to be on duty on Monday 29 July. I have listened to paramedics describe the scene they walked into at the community centre in Southport. Children and adults who had been dancing to Taylor Swift were lying bleeding and, in some cases, tragically dying as a result of an unimaginable, senseless, mindless attack. Those paramedics had to make split-second decisions about who to treat and in what order to give the injured the best chance of survival. Security teams cleared busy hospital corridors to shield as many people as possible from the horror. Lab teams mobilised blood supplies. Receptionists fielded calls from panic-stricken patients. Surgical teams across multiple hospitals worked together, fighting to save those young lives. Even now, months later, mental health staff are picking up the pieces for families who are either grieving or going through the unimaginable challenge of supporting their children through what they witnessed.

On that day, those NHS responders—the whole team involved—were the best of humanity confronting the worst. That is who NHS staff are. That is what they do. Let me be clear: the NHS may be broken, but NHS staff did not break it. I want to be clear about this too: what is broken can be fixed. While the NHS may be in the midst of the worst crisis in its history, the biggest asset that we have is the people who work in it. They are up

for the challenge, and up for change. The NHS is broken, but it is not beaten. Together with the 1.5 million people working in the health service, this Government will turn our NHS around, get it back on its feet, and make it fit for the future.

Dr Jeevun Sandher (Loughborough) (Lab): Across my constituency, my constituents are struggling to see the GPs they need; indeed, we see that across the whole nation. On Friday, I visited the Park View surgery, where the GPs do not have the necessary resources and cannot move into the premises that they need to be in to treat their patients. Can the Secretary of State assure me that he will follow Lord Darzi's recommendations and invest in primary care, so that my constituents get the GPs they need and the Park View surgery can move into the premises that it needs, with the capital expenditure that it requires?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. Of course it is not just in Loughborough that we have a challenge with access to general practice; it is right across the country. I want to be clear, because GPs come in for a lot of criticism: primary care may be broken, and the front door to the NHS may be broken, but GPs did not break it. In fact, there are fewer GPs now than there were in 2015, yet they are providing more appointments. They have worked hard to improve the productivity of general practice, but they are under-resourced. That is why we are committed, as I told the Royal College of GPs just last week, to delivering the shift that we need out of hospitals and into the community—to growing primary care, including general practice, as a proportion of the NHS's budget, so that we have the GPs needed to treat patients on time.

Alison Griffiths (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): Saturday was World Meningitis Day, but in the last year we have seen an almost doubling of meningitis cases in the UK. Does the Secretary of State think that the meningitis vaccination take-up rate is where it should be?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the hon. Member for her question. No, I do not think that the take-up rate is where it should be. That is why in the short time we have been in office we have put more effort and energy into vaccine take-up, but there is more to do. I welcome her to the House, and will not have a go at her for the record of the people who sat on the Government Benches just before the general election.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): At the end of September, a large GP federation serving patients across Sussex suddenly went bust, causing 130 redundancies; patient care was severely affected. The federation reported that the cause was a failure to obtain long-term contracts from any of its major clients, and the erosion of the real-terms value of contracts with both primary care networks and NHS Sussex. Does the Secretary of State agree that protecting continuity of service is key to public confidence in primary care, and will he meet me to discuss this case?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the hon. Member for her intervention. I wish that this was a challenge only in her constituency; it is a challenge right across the country. As I said to the Royal College of GPs last week, it will take time to rebuild general practice, so that it is back

where we want it to be. We would be delighted to hear more from her; I will ensure that my Department makes contact, and that a Minister is in touch about the challenge in her constituency.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for today's debate. The whole House, and indeed the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, wishes him well in bringing forward the changes that we wish to see. An issue that comes to my attention regularly is research and development. We hear in the press every day about new advances in treating diabetes, heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, dementia and rare diseases. When we look at the bigger picture of the NHS, we see the big problems, but sometimes there are smaller issues. Will he reassure us that research and development will be encouraged?

Wes Streeting: I strongly agree. Although health is devolved, I look forward to working constructively and closely with Governments right across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because every part of the health system in every part of the UK is going through challenges. We are determined to do that. *[Interruption.]* I think the hon. Member wants to come in again.

Jim Shannon: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommendations go from here to Northern Ireland, and then we endorse them; if we do not get them from here to start with, we cannot make people better. That is the point that I was trying to make.

Wes Streeting: The hon. Member's point is taken.

The NHS stands at a fork in the road. There is a choice before us, and the parties represented in the House have different opinions on the best way forward. The first option is for the NHS to continue on its current path—to head down the road to ruin, on a mismanaged decline, with a status quo so poor that patients are forced to raid their savings to go private, and with the worst yet to come, because many Opposition Members believe that all patients should have to put their hands in their pockets when they fall ill. Reform UK has openly stated that it wants to change the funding model and replace it with an insurance-based system, and plenty in the Conservative party want to head in the same direction, chasing Reform UK down the hard-right rabbit hole.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): That is nonsense.

Wes Streeting: The shadow Secretary of State says that it is nonsense. She is very upset about it, so let me point out to her that earlier this year, the Conservative former dentistry Minister, who served in her team, under her leadership, proposed a monthly £10 insurance fee to see a dentist. That is what the Conservatives were planning before the election. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member wants to intervene, I will give way.

Victoria Atkins: I will happily intervene. That is simply incorrect. There are a couple of points that the Secretary of State has made that are completely wrong, which I will have to correct in my speech. He is no longer in opposition. He needs to be careful what he says on the record. That is not right.

Wes Streeting: Honestly, Madam Deputy Speaker, "brass neck" springs to mind. Once again, the hon. Member gets to her feet and fails to say the word "sorry". If she wants to correct the record, how about she stands up and corrects the abysmal record that she and her predecessors lumbered this country with? They took the NHS from being the very best—that is how it was left in 2010—to being the very worst; that is how she inherited it. If she wants to talk about humility, she might like to start demonstrating some before her time in Parliament comes to an end.

If the hon. Member wants to distance herself from her former dentistry Minister, let us turn to the candidate seeking to lead her party who is head and shoulders above the rest with its membership, the right hon. Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch). She wants to go even further. On whether the NHS should be free at the point of use, she told *The Times* last month:

"I think we need to have a serious cross-party, national conversation."

That is what she said about whether the NHS should be free at the point of use. I suspect that she has blamed the journalist for her own words since, but just so that Government Members are clear, that will happen over my dead body. This Labour Government will always defend our NHS as a public service that is free at the point of use, so that whenever someone falls ill, they never have to worry about the bill.

The problem is not, and has never been, the fair, equitable model of funding. It is the same model that we had in 2010, when the last Labour Government delivered the shortest waiting times and highest patient satisfaction in history. A universal, single-payer health service is the fairest, most equitable way to provide healthcare. More than that, in a way that could never have been predicted in 1948 by Attlee and Bevan, it makes the NHS the best placed healthcare system in the world for the revolution taking place in genomics, technology and life sciences. The NHS has the right funding model, but it is not taking advantage of the opportunities in front of it. That is what we need to change.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Under the previous Government, poor investment and a lack of respect for NHS workers, particularly in primary care, resulted in Portsmouth North having over 3,000 patients per GP. That has resulted in over 1,800 people waiting more than a month to see a GP. Despite that, Lord Darzi notes that many of the solutions can be found in parts of the NHS in our constituencies. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge the fantastic initiative and hard work of GPs in Portsmouth North, as they work alongside trainee GPs from King's College London, and look to push that across the country?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is right. In Portsmouth and right across the country, there are people who, against the backdrop of the previous Government, have none the less tried to innovate, do things differently and improve services for patients. Especially given that they sent her to represent them here in Parliament, I am sure they are relieved that they now have a Labour Government on their side.

Robin Swann (South Antrim) (UUP): Chapter 5 of Lord Darzi's report is about where and how the money should be spent. I know from previous experience that there is a lot of money that can be spent in the national health service, but does the Secretary of State agree that we have to invest to save? We cannot simply move about the money that we currently have in the health service. Investment is needed to allow us to go into the greater detail that Lord Darzi talks about in respect of moving from analogue to digital and from primary care back into the community. That needs investment; it cannot be done simply with the budget that is there.

Wes Streeting: I strongly agree with the former Minister. I will take that as a representation for the forthcoming Budget and spending review, and ensure that his comments are sent straight to my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Without pre-empting future fiscal events, we have been clear for some time that it is investment and reform that deliver results. That is how the last Labour Government delivered the shortest waiting times and the highest patient satisfaction in history. If people are in any doubt about what investment minus reform does, they need only look at what Darzi says about our hospitals: after 2019, lots of resource was poured in, particularly in relation to staffing, but productivity fell. It is investment and reform that deliver results, and this Labour Government will deliver both.

Chris Curtis (Milton Keynes North) (Lab): One of the moments before the last general election that I will never forget was turning up at Milton Keynes hospital with my 91-year-old grandmother, who we suspected was having a heart attack, only to be told that the average waiting time at that moment was nine and a half hours. Milton Keynes has some of the longest NHS waiting lists in the country, because of the damage done by the last Tory Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we all deserve an apology from the Conservatives, not just for the state they left our NHS in, but for going into the election promising a new hospital for Milton Keynes even though they clearly did not have a plan to deliver it?

Wes Streeting: I was delighted to visit Milton Keynes hospital with my hon. Friend before the general election. It is doing incredible work in the conditions that he describes; in particular, its innovation in the application of smart, everyday, practical technology to improve patients' experience is to be commended.

I share my hon. Friend's anger, his constituents' anger and the anger of people right across the country in every community—including mine, by the way, where a hospital upgrade was promised. We were told there was a plan and a timetable, and we were told that the programme was fully funded. Then we came into government to find that the timetables were a work of fiction and that the funding runs out in March. That is something else that the shadow Secretary of State should apologise for, and I look forward to hearing her apology. People across the country are owed an apology.

Let me say to every hon. Member who is in the same position that I, my hon. Friend and people across the country are in that we will not play fast and loose with the public's trust, and we will come forward with a plan

for the upgrade of hospitals that is credible, achievable and funded. That is the difference between the way that this Labour Government will behave, in terms of both public trust and public money, and the way that the previous Conservative Government behaved, which was a total disgrace.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): On top of coming clean to the public and making a change from the way the previous Government treated the country, will the Secretary of State also assure the House that the Government will establish a proper, effective and honest workforce plan? After the years of Johnsonian bluster, when there was no effective workforce plan, the nurses who are the backbone of the NHS are still being paid £29,000 a year at grade 5. As the Royal College of Nursing says, it is about retention of staff, not just recruitment. They are leaving in droves because they cannot stand the unsafe circumstances in which they are operating.

Wes Streeting: The hon. Member is right to raise the issues of recruitment and retention. My message to staff who are thinking of leaving the NHS, or who perhaps have left the NHS in recent years because of working conditions and because there was no light at the end of the tunnel, is to stay—or indeed return—and help us to be the generation that takes the NHS from the worst crisis in its history, gets it back on its feet and ensures that it is fit for the future.

On the workforce plan, let me just say that it was regrettable that it was only at 5 minutes to midnight that the previous Government published such a plan. We were highly flattered by the fact that so much that underpinned that plan was Labour party policy commitments, such as doubling the number of medical school places and increasing the number of nursing and midwifery clinical training places. We are committed to those headline commitments. We will inevitably want to update the workforce plan in the light of the 10-year plan and some of the analysis that underpins Darzi. We are clear that that kind of long-term workforce planning is essential, and we are committed—

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind) *rose—*

Wes Streeting: I must make some progress; I will try to take more interventions shortly.

The public are clear that they do not want the NHS to be sacrificed. They gave Labour our marching orders at the general election to rescue the NHS and turn it around, and that is what we will do. I appreciate that the shadow Health Secretary must be embarrassed by all this, not just by the state that she and her Conservative predecessors left the NHS in, but by what Conservative Members have been saying. I was going to say, "Members who are sat behind her," but they are actually not—I think they are hiding in shame. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Health Secretary says from a sedentary position that we have already had this discussion. The Conservatives would rather we just moved on and forgot their abysmal record. Well, I am afraid that we are not ready to do that just yet. At least some of her Back Benchers now say what they refused to say when they were in office: that the NHS is broken. Some of them even admit that only Labour can fix it.

When the shadow Secretary of State stands up, I wonder whether she can tell us whether she agrees with the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), who said:

“I applaud Wes Streeting for having the political courage. I think only Labour can really say this. The NHS is sort of their thing...I really hope that we can get behind him”.

It is not just Back Benchers. What about the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell)? He said:

“I’m very supportive of what Wes Streeting is saying... The Conservative government put a lot of money into the NHS, the record is there for all to see... I’m not one of those who is seeking to attack...the Labour Party on the NHS.”

He is going for my vote, but sadly—or gladly—I am not qualified to vote in that particular election. Perhaps the shadow Health Secretary can tell us what the shadow Foreign Secretary meant when he said we were not—*[Interruption.]* She is clearly enjoying this. Was the shadow Foreign Secretary speaking for the shadow Cabinet? *[Interruption.]* No, he was not.

Let me move to my favourite comments on the NHS from a Tory MP. This right hon. Member said:

“We were not obsessed with how we can ensure that it actually delivers the experience that patients actually deserve...Out of fear of our opponents mischaracterising our efforts, we shirked the difficult decisions...If Wes Streeting comes forward with genuine reforms I think we should back him.”

Those are the words of the candidate that the shadow Health Secretary is backing to lead her party, so does she agree with the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick)? Will she finally apologise for her part in the Tories’ abysmal record and have the humility to admit that when it came to NHS reform their cupboard was bare, and that actually they quite agree with our efforts to clean up the mess that they left behind?

For all the agreement with our diagnosis and praise of our plans, the problem is that there is no apology. Of the four leadership candidates and eight former Health Secretaries, not a single one has apologised for the state they left the NHS in. Would the shadow Health Secretary like to correct that record today and finally say sorry? I expect that we might have to wait a long time. While the Conservatives continue the longest leadership election in history, we are getting on with the job of cleaning up their mess.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): The reform that we desperately need includes the so-called “left shift” out of hospitals and into primary care. Yet under the previous Government, the amount of money spent on hospitals went from 47% to 58% of the NHS budget. According to Age UK, every day 2,000 people are admitted to hospital who could be treated elsewhere and earlier. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only way to fix the NHS is to get more and better care in the community?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that brings me to our reform agenda.

To deliver the Government’s reform agenda, we will have to take on both left and right-wing orthodoxies—for simplicity’s sake, we will call them *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Mail* agrees on the need for health service reform, but attacks proposals for public health reform as “nanny state”. *The Guardian* loves prevention,

but all this talk about health service reform makes it very nervous. The truth is that the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* are half right and half wrong. We all need to face up to the challenges of today. Our society is getting older and living longer but becoming sicker sooner. Those rising tides of demands and costs are combining to form a perfect storm that threatens to shipwreck the NHS.

Shockat Adam: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Wes Streeting: I must make progress.

The right must accept that without reform on public health, we will pay a heavy price, with higher taxes and poorer quality of life—exactly the sort of dependency culture that the right rails against. The left must accept that investment without reform of the health service would be killing the NHS with kindness, with more cash and poor results until the public give up altogether.

Several hon. Members rose—

Wes Streeting: I must make more progress.

That is the choice: public health reform or higher taxes; NHS reform or no NHS. The Tories did neither; Labour will do both. It really is reform or die, and we choose reform. That is why this month we will begin formal engagement with NHS staff and patients, who will help to write the 10-year plan for our NHS—a plan that will deliver the change and modernisation that our health service is crying out for—with three big shifts in its focus.

First, a shift from hospital to community will turn the NHS into a neighbourhood health service as much as a national health service, so that patients get more of their tests, scans and healthcare on high streets and in town centres in their own community, and from the comfort of their own home. It will ensure that patients can easily book appointments to see the GP they want to see in the manner that they choose, and it will bring back the family doctor, rebuild NHS dentistry and build a national care service.

Shockat Adam: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Wes Streeting: I must make progress. There are lots of speakers and little time.

Secondly, there will be a shift from sickness to prevention. It will mean that we take action to give our children a healthier and happier life, flattening the curve of rising pressures that threaten to overwhelm the NHS by building a healthier society, which will help to build a healthier economy.

Thirdly, there will be a shift from analogue to digital. Upgrading the NHS app will give patients real choice and control over their own healthcare, creating a single patient record owned by the patient and shared across the system so that every part of the NHS has a full picture of the patient that they are treating. Getting the NHS working hand in glove with our country’s leading scientists will put modern technology and equipment in the hands of NHS staff, and patients at the front of the queue for the latest treatments.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) rose—

Wes Streeting: I must begin to conclude my remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I see that the Chair of the Select Committee on Health and Social Care is seeking my eye. Given that I will be before her Committee soon and know where my bread is buttered, I give way.

Layla Moran: The Secretary of State is very kind indeed. I can take no credit for what I am about to say, which comes from reports on prevention and digital transformation published by the previous Select Committee, which he would do very well to look at. What those reports say is very much echoed in Lord Darzi's report—particularly that the place-based narratives about embedding the NHS into our communities are key, as is reform of Government as a whole, and embedding health in every Department. Will he say a bit more about reform in Government, and not just reform in the NHS?

Wes Streeting: I strongly agree with the Chair of the Select Committee and commend the work of the previous Committee, to which she refers. She has certainly given me some revision for the first meeting that I will attend. To answer her question, she is absolutely right that digital transformation and place-based healthcare planning are key. This Government will have a much sharper focus on health inequalities than the previous Government did. In fact, if we consider the NHS over the past 30 or 40 years, even when it has performed well overall, and patients in every part of the country have received access to timely care, some health systems have still been more challenged than others. We need to be honest about the structural challenges in those areas. Secondly, she is absolutely right that, if we are serious about health and prevention, we need a serious cross-Government approach. That is why I am delighted that the Prime Minister's mission-driven approach has already seen Departments coming together with a focus on prevention. That will deliver fruit.

This is the major surgery that our national health service needs over the next decade to make it fit for the future. There is no time to waste, so we have hit the ground running. We inherited a Care Quality Commission that is not fit for purpose. I was genuinely stunned to learn that one in five health and care providers has never been inspected; some hospitals have been left uninspected for a decade; and inspectors were sent to care homes when they had never met someone with dementia. The Conservatives did not think that patients would like the answers, so they stopped asking the questions. This Labour Government are different: we will be honest about the problems facing the health service, and serious about solving them. Our policy is radical candour.

Today I am delighted to announce that Sir Julian Hartley has been appointed the new chief executive of the CQC. He is a proven reformer with a track record of turning around large organisations, and I am confident that he will provide the leadership that staff in the CQC need to address this crisis, improve patient safety and restore confidence in the regulator. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, so this Government are taking action to turn the regulator around. That is the difference a Labour Government make.

We inherited the farce of newly qualified GPs facing unemployment. Patients could not get a GP appointment, while GPs could not get a job, so we cut red tape, found the funding and are recruiting an extra 1,000 GPs.

That is the difference a Labour Government make. We have tabled a motion to ban junk food ads targeted at children—our first step towards making our country's children the healthiest generation that has ever lived. That is the difference a Labour Government make. Just this week, the Secretary of State for Science and Technology and I announced funding to produce new cutting-edge cancer treatments: a new blood test that can detect 12 different cancers. We are backing Britain's scientists to save lives. That is the difference a Labour Government make.

Of course, strikes in the NHS have cost taxpayers billions. Patients saw 1.5 million operations and appointments cancelled. The Conservatives saw strikes as an opportunity to scapegoat NHS staff, so they let the strikes rage on. In fact, the shadow Health Secretary had not even bothered to meet the junior doctors since March. This Government do not exploit problems; we solve them. I called the junior doctors on day one and met them in week one, and in just three weeks, we had negotiated a deal to end the strikes. That is the difference a Labour Government make.

Those are just our first steps. Rebuilding the NHS will not be easy and it will take time, but we have done it before and we will do it again. Along with the millions of dedicated staff in health and social care across our country, this can be the generation that takes the NHS from the worst crisis in its history to build an NHS fit for the future—an NHS that is there for us when we need it, with world-class care for the many, not just the few. That is the change that Britain voted for; that is the change we will deliver together; and that change has already begun.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Before I bring in the Opposition Front Benchers, the House should be aware that over 50 Members wish to speak in the debate, so I ask you to help each other. On this occasion, I will impose a three-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, with the exception of maiden speeches and that of the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee. I call the shadow Secretary of State.

7.48 pm

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): On this, the first anniversary of Hamas's horrific attack on Israel, our thoughts are with Israel, the victims of that horrific attack and their loved ones, and with all those who are trying to rescue the hostages, get aid where it is needed and bring peace to the region.

Day 95 of this fumbling Labour Government, and yet another general debate to talk about a report that we talked about three weeks ago. That seems to be the golden—or Gray—thread running through this Government: lots of talk, but where is the action? If the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care wanted to make a meaningful contribution to the nation's health, why did he not bring forward the Second Reading of the Tobacco And Vapes Bill this evening, to help our children and bring about the first smokefree generation? That Bill is ready to go; why are the Government not?

The right hon. Gentleman could have provided an update to the House on the 40,000 more appointments that he promised many times during the campaign, which the latest answer from his Minister to a written

parliamentary question suggests is nowhere near happening. It is perhaps about as likely as the Prime Minister paying for his own glasses. The right hon. Gentleman could have set out the steps that his Department is taking to prepare the NHS for winter. In the spring, I asked the system to start planning for this winter. How many beds, ambulances and care packages has he put into the system to prepare it for winter? He could have set out the terms of the royal commission on social care. We in the Conservative party stand ready to help on that royal commission, because we believe in constructive opposition, yet we have heard nothing from this Government. The right hon. Gentleman could have launched the much-hyped 10-year plan, which he promised before the election was “oven-ready”, but appears to be in the deep freeze. How many more Government resets will there be before that 10-year plan is launched?

Instead, in their first 95 days, this Labour Government have talked down the economy and the NHS, stopped new hospitals from being built, scrapped NHS productivity improvements, overseen GPs entering industrial action, been exposed in a health cronyism scandal, and opened a dispute with hundreds of thousands of nurses and midwives. They seek to justify all of that with the Darzi report. That report, from a former Labour Health Minister, has sunk as quickly as it was briefed out. It looks backwards, but not far enough to mark the last Labour Government’s policy and operational failures. If this Government are serious about reforming the NHS—and I genuinely hope they are—they and the Secretary of State need to transition quickly from opposing to governing.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Victoria Atkins: I will finish this point. That transition must begin with the language that the Secretary of State is choosing to use about the NHS. Interestingly, we have heard a little bit of nuance for the first time tonight, perhaps because health leaders are raising concerns that his “broken” narrative is damaging public confidence and will lead to people not coming forward for care, as was reported on the day that the right hon. Gentleman gave his speech to conference. That narrative is hurting the morale of staff who are working tirelessly for their patients. As the confected doom and gloom of the new Chancellor damages business confidence, so too does the Health Secretary’s relentlessly negative language risk consequences in real life.

Let me say what the Health Secretary refuses to acknowledge: the NHS is here for us and is ready to help. Its dedicated staff look after 1.6 million people per day, a 25% increase from the days of the last Labour Government. That is why I am always a little concerned whenever the right hon. Gentleman harks back so far; I do not think he has quite understood the change in capacity and scale of the national health service since we inherited it from the last Labour Government. The majority of those 1.6 million people will receive good care. *[Interruption.]* These are just facts, but I know the Health Secretary finds them difficult to receive.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Victoria Atkins: In one moment.

Of course, it is important that we focus relentlessly on those patients who do not receive good care, but that will not be achieved by writing off the 1.5 million people who work in the NHS. In fact, the NHS has more doctors, nurses and investment than at any point in its history. It is delivering millions more outpatient appointments and diagnostic tests and procedures for patients than in 2010, and NHS mental health services are supporting 3.6 million people a year, a 10% increase in one year alone.

Dr Evans *rose*—

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab) *rose*—

Victoria Atkins: I will give way to the doctor behind me, and then I will give way again.

Dr Evans: It is interesting that Lord Darzi chose 2010, because there were some good points in what the Labour Government put in place, but there was also the problem of Mid Staffs. We had the Medical Training Application Service fiasco around medical careers, for which Patricia Hewitt had to apologise, and we had the £11 billion IT project that was put in place and has now failed as well. These things shape the NHS, and when we are trying to come up with solutions, they impact on the way that doctors, leaders and politicians come together. Does my right hon. Friend have suggestions for how we can take the politics out of this debate, enabling us to have a sensible debate on reform, which I think both sides of this House would like to see?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend, who brings his clinical experience and expertise to this debate. I say frankly to the Secretary of State that I wish he had taken the approach of the Defence Secretary, who has set up a cross-party commission on defence spending. Indeed, he has invited my former colleagues to sit on that review, because he understands that we bring an enormous amount of knowledge, experience, and—dare I say it?—some hard knocks from working in those massively complex Departments.

The right hon. Gentleman knows me. We have done good-humoured battle over the Dispatch Boxes for a long time now, and had he come to me and asked me to help him, I genuinely would have. *[Interruption.]* The public are hearing this. They want politicians to cut all the flim-flam and the bluster and work together, and had the right hon. Gentleman been serious about the Darzi report, he would have done exactly as his colleague around the Cabinet table has done and conducted a cross-party review of the NHS to ensure that we can make real progress. It is interesting that the Health Secretary does not appear to agree with the approach that his Cabinet colleague has taken.

Peter Prinsley *rose*—

Victoria Atkins: I will listen to the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* I am very generous with interventions, and I know that he brings expertise and experience to the House as well.

Peter Prinsley: I am grateful that you have given way, and thank you for that. I have been sitting listening to you—*[HON. MEMBERS: “Shadow Secretary of State.”]* I am sorry, I am getting the hang of this. To be honest,

[Peter Prinsley]

I am struggling to recognise what the right hon. Lady is talking about. The state of the health service is a disgrace; the Opposition, who I believe were the Government until quite recently, have totally messed the situation up over a period of 14 years. What Lord Darzi has had to say is a pretty accurate diagnosis of the situation we are in, so it is quite surprising to listen to the shadow Secretary of State talk as if everything was perfect over the last 14 years. That is simply not the case.

Victoria Atkins: I will help the hon. Gentleman, because I appreciate that he is new to this place. If he had been listening carefully to me, he would have heard that I am and have always been—in fairness, I hope the Health Secretary would acknowledge this as well—very open about the fact that the NHS needs reform. In fact, I said as Secretary of State that I wanted to reform our NHS to make it faster, simpler and fairer.

By the way, I speak with personal experience. I know there are some Members on the Back Benches who are new to this place and perhaps have not quite moved on from the natural competitiveness of a general election campaign, but I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of three. I have seen the very best of the NHS, but I have also seen some of its darkest corners. The NHS is genuinely one of the reasons why I came into politics, and one of the most damaging things about political discourse and the healthcare system in this country is when people seek to attribute to others a lack of care or commitment to our healthcare system, just because we have different ways of tackling these challenges and different solutions.

This is why—I will say this again, because I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman is listening—I will work constructively with him to improve the health service, but we have to do this on the facts. Some of the suggestions he made in the debate today and in his discourse during the general election campaign and so on are not accurate, and this is where I will pull him up. For example, he has not mentioned the introduction of Pharmacy First or the 160 community diagnostic centres. Just to help him, those were backed by the largest central cash investment in MRI and CT scanning capacity in the history of the NHS. Those, as well as the new surgical hubs that we introduced, are not only putting healthcare into the community but, critically, helping to improve the numbers of chest checks and scans going through the system, which means speedier diagnosis.

Wes Streeting: The right hon. Lady mentions Pharmacy First. How many pharmacies went bust on her watch?

Victoria Atkins: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, because I imagine he will have got exactly the same briefing I used to get when I was in his shoes and being advised by exactly the same civil servants—and I am having to let this flow back into my memory here—the average person in England is within walking distance of their pharmacy. He will know that in many high streets in our market towns, as well as in London and other urban areas, there is a density of pharmacies. We want to support those pharmacies to ensure they are able to provide the services that they can provide, and in fairness,

to enable pharmacists to work at the top of their licences. He supported Pharmacy First when I introduced it, so I am a little surprised that he appears to be casting doubt on it, but I am grateful for his intervention.

The next point is that our women's health strategy—it does not have the attention from his ministerial team that it should have at the moment, and I hope that will improve over the coming months—is seeing the roll-out of women's health hubs across England into every integrated care board area by the end of this year, ensuring that women's health issues receive the attention they deserve.

Of course, there are parts of the NHS that need to change and do much better. The NHS needs to reform for the future of healthcare, and our focus must be on improving outcomes for patients, not protecting structures, bureaucracy and vested interests in the NHS. As I have said repeatedly, we will scrutinise constructively and support any meaningful efforts to reform the NHS to improve outcomes and experiences for patients, because we all want the NHS to thrive.

However, after nearly 100 days, there has not been anything yet for us to scrutinise or indeed support from this Government. [Interruption.] The Secretary of State says he has just given me a list. Interestingly, I am pretty sure that three out of those four were started under my Government. [Interruption.] I am pretty sure that I was the Secretary of State who ordered the review of the Care Quality Commission, precisely because I was so concerned. He will be able to build on that report, and quite rightly so, but he should please be careful of his facts. Disappointingly, it is the right hon. Gentleman's fondness for parties and concerts that has made the news recently, rather than his health policies. This Government need to sober up and start taking responsibility for their choices.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): On Saturday, I had a surgery appointment with a young lady who has struggled to access support for her eating disorder and mental health issues. She has gone through some of the most difficult experiences anybody can go through. She asked me a simple question: "Why have I been unable to access NHS support for my mental health?" What would the shadow Secretary of State say to my constituent, who, when she looks back at the reasons, frankly blames the previous Government?

Victoria Atkins: First, I am very sorry to hear that. Again, the way we were trying to deal with the enormous increase we have seen in mental ill health across our country was first of all to boost mental health services for children and young people. Indeed, the hon. Member may not be aware of this, but we rolled out mental health support teams across nearly 45% of schools. We wanted to complete that to 100% of schools by the end of the decade, and I very much hope that the Secretary of State will be taking up that policy and delivering it.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes) might know that there seems to have been a real increase in eating disorders since the pandemic. We know, for example, that the impact of social media sites, and the algorithms that sit behind them, can lead people who are already feeling very vulnerable into even darker places. So when the Secretary of State says that there should be a cross-Government piece of work, I very

much agree with him—I hope he will achieve that through his mission board. But we really have to look at how we as a society can deal with some of these causes, because I do not think anyone is happy with seeing such a huge increase in anxiety and mental ill health among our young people since the pandemic.

Jim Shannon: One of the things that came up at our party conference some time ago was a recommendation from the British Medical Association and the General Medical Council to encourage medical students into local trusts by paying their fees, which would pay for itself given the cost of locum doctors in each of our health trusts. Would the shadow Secretary of State support that, and would she in turn encourage the Government to do likewise?

Victoria Atkins: I hope the hon. Gentleman knows by now that when he makes a suggestion, I will take it away. He will appreciate that, as part of a constructive Opposition, I want to look carefully at the ramifications—both the intended and unintended consequences—of policies suggested in the Chamber, but that sounds very interesting. I thank him for his contribution, as always.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Victoria Atkins: I am going to make some progress.

One of the choices facing the Health Secretary is whether he will fight for the investment required from the Treasury to implement the productivity plan. At spring Budget, the Conservatives announced more than £3.4 billion of investment to upgrade IT systems, expand services on the NHS app and make better use of artificial intelligence, in order to reduce bureaucracy for staff and free up clinical time for doctors and nurses. Alongside the long-term workforce plan—the first ever in the history of the NHS—this plan will see productivity grow by 2% a year by the end of the decade and unlock £35 billion of savings, yet the productivity plan is not mentioned anywhere in this 163-page report.

This plan was made in partnership with NHS England and funded by the Conservative Government. While the right hon. Gentleman has talked a good game on productivity, we are still waiting for him to confirm his commitment to deliver the plan that was drawn up with NHS England to help improve productivity. I asked him three weeks ago whether he was cancelling this plan, and he failed to answer. I am very happy to give way now if he wants to commit to it. The whole NHS would like to know.

Wes Streeting: I am delighted that the shadow Secretary of State has so generously given way. I am not going to pre-empt the Chancellor's announcements at the Budget and the spending review, but I say to her that the reason why so many of the things she said at this Dispatch Box as Secretary of State were a pile of nonsense is that they were plans built on a pillar of sand—a £22 billion black hole for which she and her party are yet to apologise. Will she do that now?

Victoria Atkins: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, calculations were made in the Treasury for this economic inheritance, but the Treasury cannot even explain how it has arrived at those calculations. If I were him, I would be a little bit careful of relying on that figure, because I fear it may trip up his Chancellor in due course. Perhaps

the reason why he cannot answer the question about whether he is in fact committed to the productivity plan is that his friend the former Health Secretary, who has been walking in and out of the Department for Health with all of his private healthcare businesses, has not told him whether he plans to accept it, but we will find that out in due course.

The Secretary of State's silence continues with new medicines, technology and trials. These will be at the forefront of the reforms needed in health services across the world, let alone the NHS, yet the Darzi report mentioned NICE only once in 163 pages. Even worse, I am hearing from the life sciences sector that he and his team are refusing to meet these businesses, putting at risk the hundreds of millions of pounds of investment that the Conservative Government secured, as well as the highly skilled jobs they provide and the life-enhancing treatments they promise our constituents. It is his responsibility to persuade the Chancellor to continue supporting and investing in this innovation for the future, because patients will not thank Labour if it refuses to engage in the medical revolution with these businesses.

Another choice that the right hon. Gentleman must make—we perhaps have a precursor of what he is going to say—concerns the workforce. We know that NHS staff are at the heart of our healthcare services, and that training, retaining and developing our workforce is critical to the future of the NHS. The Conservative Government created the first ever long-term workforce plan for the NHS—again, a plan that was asked for and welcomed by the whole NHS, and developed hand in hand with NHS England to train the doctors, nurses, midwives and other healthcare staff that we need now and in the future. The plan was described by NHS England's chief executive as

“one of the most seminal moments in our 75-year history.”

Crikey, even the right hon. Gentleman supported it. Yet this supposedly independent investigation failed to mention the plan once. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that this Government stand by this plan and will fund it as the Conservatives would do? [*Interruption.*] He says that he talked about it, but he did not give an answer, because his job is to ask the Chancellor for this funding—has he done so?

Wes Streeting: I did.

Victoria Atkins: Right, okay. We have that on the record now and we will wait to see what happens at the Budget.

It is also striking that the report mentions pay and wages only twice in 163 pages, despite the fact that staff costs account for 65% of provider operating costs a year. If the report and the Secretary of State do not acknowledge the single biggest cost pressure for providers, how can they claim to have the answers on reform? He claims to have sorted out industrial action in the NHS, and I must again correct him on something. He keeps referencing when I last had a conversation with the junior doctors committee, as it then was. What he neglects to tell us is that we entered mediation with junior doctors in May—he never thinks to mention that when he is holding forth at the Dispatch Box.

Wes Streeting: How did it go?

Victoria Atkins: We entered into that negotiation in good faith, and I gently remind Labour Members of Parliament who were here before the last election that again and again I asked the right hon. Gentleman and Labour MPs to condemn the strike actions and they refused to do so, because we know of their links to their union paymasters—[*Interruption.*] I will just say “train drivers” and leave that hanging in the air.

When I asked the right hon. Gentleman during Health and Social Care questions in July whether he was going to cut services or whether the Chancellor was going to raise taxes for the junior doctors pay rise, he assured the House that any pay rise would be affordable. How affordable does his deal look now? He has given resident doctors an inflation-busting pay rise for being on strike, and he is paying them for the days they were on strike. He did that with no reform and no productivity improvements attached to it, and with more strikes threatened for next spring. Completely foreseeably, that has led to nurses and midwives asking why they should accept less. Simply telling nurses, “We’re on your side” will not heat their homes this winter. The report does not deal with the here and now; it looks only at the past. Indeed, the Darzi report talks about the importance of capital investment, so if the right hon. Gentleman intends to use the report to inform his policy decisions, as he says he does, why is he stopping new hospitals from being built?

There are now 24 hospitals whose futures are at risk, despite commitments from the right hon. Gentleman and Labour candidates during the election campaign. Labour candidates in Watford, Hillingdon, Milton Keynes, Leeds and Basingstoke made promises to their voters that are now at risk under this Labour Government. Patients in Chelsea and Fulham, Truro, Harlow, Plymouth and Kettering will not get the investment and upgrades that they deserve, despite the promises of their Labour candidates. [*Interruption.*] Do not believe a word when this Secretary of State says, as he is saying now, that it is because of the economy. The truth is that he had been planning to pause those hospitals since May 2023. For those who are wondering, the details are in his health mission paper, which was published to great fanfare in May 2023—page 6, if that helps. He was planning this since May last year, which is exactly why the promises made at the election were so cynical and now need to be revealed.

Take a perhaps unhealthy dose of salt with the right hon. Gentleman’s claim that the money runs only until March next year. Let me help this very inexperienced Secretary of State understand basic Treasury rules. The comprehensive spending review period finishes in March. I wish I could have bound this Labour Government to committing to those hospitals in the next CSR period, but I could not. It is his responsibility and his role to fight for funding from the Chancellor to ensure that the hospitals are built. We promised that we would allocate the money needed, and would prioritise the new hospitals in the next CSR period. It is now the job of this Secretary of State to secure the money from his Labour Chancellor.

Through our plans to invest in more capital projects, we also sought to improve cancer diagnosis and treatment. While outcomes have improved since 2010, there is much more to do. That is why we opened 160 community diagnostic centres, rolled out new lung cancer screening programmes, and expanded the use of artificial intelligence

to speed up diagnoses. Again, we note the lack of any mention of those centres or hubs, which would reduce waiting lists and speed up diagnoses, in this supposedly independent review by the former Labour Health Minister.

I want a straight answer from the Minister in their winding-up speech on an issue that is worrying families up and down the country. Cancer is the single biggest killer of children under the age of 14. I launched the children and young people’s cancer taskforce, which brought together top clinicians, leading cancer charities and the Government to combat childhood cancer, and improve diagnosis and access to new treatments. Its launch was warmly welcomed by parents and charities, and experts were lending their time to the taskforce for free, yet this Secretary of State has chosen to pause it. Parents and charities including the Teenage Cancer Trust, Young Lives vs Cancer, and Solving Kids’ Cancer UK cannot understand why the Health Secretary has chosen to stop that work. That is his choice, and the Minister must please explain in the wind-ups why the decision was taken to pause it.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): The right hon. Lady makes the point that cancer is the biggest killer of people under 40, but glioblastoma brain tumours are the biggest killer of people under the age of 40. What progress has there been in the last 30 years in the treatment and diagnosis of glioblastoma brain tumours?

Victoria Atkins: I think the hon. Lady did not hear me; I said that cancer is the biggest killer of children under the age of 14, not 40. I know only too well how that terrible brain cancer has hurt her family, and the great loss that she has suffered. I know that she has ambitions for the work that we were doing to get cancer treatments, particularly new cancer treatments, as quickly as possible to patients who are getting towards the end of their life. We will of course support anything that the Government do to help people such as the hon. Lady’s sister; again, I come back to the fact that we all want this to work.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Victoria Atkins: I will make some progress, because I know that I am trying your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Lord Darzi says that prevention is better than cure. We agree. The Government say that they are committed to prevention, but actions speak louder than words. Scrapping the winter fuel payment for millions of pensioners will undoubtedly come at a cost to the NHS. The equality analysis estimates that 780,000 of the most vulnerable pensioners who are eligible for pension credit will miss out this winter, and the cut will result in 262,000 pensioners needing NHS treatment because they are living in cold, damp homes, at an additional cost of £169 million in a year. How has the Secretary of State stood by as the Chancellor made that appalling decision, which will affect vulnerable pensioners in his constituency, as well as the NHS?

Finally, we have heard the words that the right hon. Gentleman has used about the NHS in England; it is surprising, to say the least, that he has not used those same words times 100 to describe the state of the NHS in Labour-run Wales. On almost every measure, the

NHS performs the worst in Wales, where one in four people is on an NHS waiting list. Wales has the longest waiting times; Welsh patients wait on average seven weeks longer than in England. More than 23,000 people wait longer than two years, compared with just 120 people in England. Given the Secretary of State's rhetoric about NHS England, why has he not asked Lord Darzi to take a cold, hard look at how Labour has run the NHS in Wales for 25 years?

In conclusion, we Conservatives want to support good reforms and good policies for the better health of the nation, but this backward-looking report will not improve productivity. Headlines will not drive better outcomes for patients, and speeches will not improve the life chances of our constituents. This Government need to move from words to action quickly.

8.20 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I will be brief. I think there is general consensus on Lord Darzi's review of the issues facing the NHS, but in spite of what the shadow Minister says, staff morale is low, particularly when compared with 2010. It has never been so low. I express my gratitude to and solidarity with all the staff, clinical and non-clinical, for the work they do.

I will briefly focus on the key drivers. We have heard a little about them from the Health Secretary, particularly in terms of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. I sat on both the Bill Committees. I was aghast, having just come out of the NHS and having faced the issues. I just knew it would be catastrophic, and it was. It had an almost immediate impact on staff morale.

We must also recognise the impact of austerity between 2010 and 2018. NHS revenue budgets grew by just 1% each year—the lowest rate since the NHS was formed. That compares with growth of nearly 4% a year since then. In 2010, the Commonwealth Fund found that the NHS was one of the top-ranking health systems in the world. It was No. 1 for equity in access to healthcare; we are now ranked 10th. If we compare spending on healthcare, we are ranked 26th in the OECD. Austerity impacted not only the overall funding of the NHS, but the funding allocation formulas. The weighting for deprivation was slashed, so areas such as mine received less money, although we had greater health needs. Austerity also had an impact on other aspects of public funding and local government, and metropolitan areas such as mine were particularly badly affected. It stripped the support from people in need.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): I came into politics because of a desire to reverse growing inequalities in health and disability. In my constituency of Shipley, there is a 10-year gap in healthy life expectancy between those living in Wharfedale and their neighbours over the moor in Windhill. While lots needs to be done to tackle poor housing and poverty, there are things that the NHS can do. Does my hon. Friend agree that the NHS plan must prioritise prevention, as well as just treating sickness?

Debbie Abrahams: As a former public health consultant, I would obviously agree with my hon. Friend. I have similar health inequalities across Oldham. I was about to talk about the impact of other issues, such as social

security cuts, which meant greater poverty, including in-work poverty and children from working families living in poverty. That has had a consequential impact on our health as a whole. We have flatlining life expectancy, and in areas such as mine, life expectancy has got worse. That impacts on our productivity and the wealth of our country.

I will briefly mention a couple of points that I know my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recognises, and might want to consider. An annual report on the state of our health and the state of our NHS, presented to Parliament before each Budget, would pick up on the points that have been raised about cross-departmental impacts on health. We should have a prospective assessment of the impacts of the Budget and the Finance Bill on poverty and inequality, and subsequently on health and the NHS. That can be done; others are doing it. We should have a strategy to identify and address health equity issues in the NHS. We have seen a bit of that through covid, in the inequity around the use of oximeters. We should introduce something like "Improving working lives" for our staff. That had a massive effect on staff when I worked in the NHS. We need a clear commitment to the 1948 principles of the NHS, under which it is funded from general taxation, and a funding allocation based on need.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

8.25 pm

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): The findings in Lord Darzi's report are shocking, but Liberal Democrats—there are many of us here today—find that they echo the hundreds of thousands of conversations we had with people on the doorstep across the country throughout the election campaign. In too many ways, the NHS just is not working as it should, and that is a tragedy, because we all cherish the NHS and want it to succeed. It is one of our country's greatest inventions and a great Liberal idea. It is one of the things that makes us proud to be British.

We all owe so much to the NHS and the incredible hard-working staff who have kept it going under the most intense pressure imaginable. Despite their heroic efforts, there is no doubt that we have a major crisis in the NHS. Let us not forget, because it is so important—these things are intrinsically linked—that we also have a major crisis in care. The message that the British people sent at the general election in July was clear: fixing the health and care crisis must be this Government's No. 1 priority.

Before I turn to the Government's plans, it is worth reminding ourselves of the scale and urgency of the challenge. Far too many people wait weeks to see a GP or NHS dentist, if they can find one. Far too many wait months or even years to start vital treatment for serious conditions. Far too many wait for hours in pain and distress for an ambulance to arrive. I recently spoke to a constituent, Emma, whose 11-year-old daughter Charlotte suffers from a medical condition that means she is red-flagged, or a category 1 priority patient, in the case of a medical emergency. Unfortunately, Emma and Charlotte were recently involved in a car crash. Charlotte urgently needed an ambulance, but after two hours of waiting, her father decided to take her to hospital in the

[Helen Morgan]

back of his car. She starts her journey to senior school this autumn. Her family have had to devise their own response network to keep her safe and secure, and to allow her to attend school in confidence. Our ambulance service failed Charlotte and her family when they were in crisis, and we cannot let that continue.

The problems do not stop there. Across the country, almost 6.5 million people are stuck on hospital waiting lists. That is one in every nine people in England. Two million of them have been waiting for more than six months. Over the past year, more than 100,000 people have waited more than two months to start cancer treatment after an urgent referral. In my constituency of North Shropshire, almost 20% of urgent referrals took more than 43 days and 10% took more than 62 days. The target is 28 days. It is truly heartbreaking. We know that every day counts when patients are battling cancer.

Young people needing help with their mental health are waiting months and even years to access child and adolescent mental health services. There is no help for them until they are in crisis. As if all that was not bad enough, we have hospitals that are literally crumbling. There is a maintenance backlog of £11.6 billion. Buildings are decades past their use-by date. It is shocking but, as my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I know, far from exceptional. Most of these problems go back decades. The truth is that Governments of all parties have failed to put enough capital investment into the NHS. They have failed to face up to the challenge of an ageing population and, crucially, they have failed to tackle the care crisis, with one honourable exception: the Care Act 2014 was passed by Liberal Democrat Ministers a decade ago, with cross-party support. Sadly, it was ripped up by the Conservative Government after 2015.

The failure and neglect of the Conservative Government left the NHS teetering on the brink. There were so many grand promises—6,000 more GPs, 40 new hospitals and cross-party talks on social care—but they were all fantasies. In Shropshire—which is not an outlier—the Royal College of General Practitioners found that the average GP is seeing 475 more patients than they were in 2016. Patients and their loved ones have been let down so badly.

When the scale of challenges across health and social care is so enormous, it would be easy to succumb to pessimism and defeatism—doom and gloom—but we cannot afford to do that. The patients of today and tomorrow cannot afford for us to do that. This moment demands the same urgency, ambition and vision that drove the creation of the NHS all those years ago. We very much hope that the Government will show that ambition. I welcome the Secretary of State's recognition of the fundamental importance of shifting more focus to primary care—to GPs, dentists, mental health practitioners and community pharmacists—for our young people.

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): As the newly appointed Liberal Democrat spokesperson on mental health, I was really concerned to see in the report that mental health is about 20% of the NHS's burden yet receives only 10% of its funding. Certainly in Winchester—it will be the same for nearly all hon. Members in the

Chamber—mental health, and especially the mental health of children, is one of the most commonly brought up subjects.

I know that the Secretary of State agrees that mental health and physical health need to be treated with the same level of importance, but I urge us to recognise that we cannot treat it with the same level of importance if the level of funding does not accord with the demand it is putting on the service. It is not just about funding; it is about making sure that the mental health support that is needed is there in schools, in social care and for people struggling with debt. So many non-medical factors contribute to mental health that we need a cross-departmental look at how we support people's mental health.

Helen Morgan: My hon. Friend is exactly right, and we put mental health and access to primary care and health prevention front and centre of our manifesto for that very reason. I encourage the Secretary of State to take our plans where they are complementary to his and run with them. We are happy to have our ideas plagiarised—we will welcome it.

Welcome as that focus is, some of what we have heard gives me cause for concern. First, some weeks ago the Prime Minister suggested that investment can come only after reform. I warn the Secretary of State that I do not think that that will work. The reforms that our NHS needs cannot be done on the cheap. Improving access to primary care means investing in more GPs, more NHS dentists and more community pharmacists. Boosting productivity means investing in better IT systems and bringing hospitals up to date with the new facilities they need. I agree that it cannot be just more investment without reforms, but nor can it be just reform without more investment. We need that investment now. The reports that we have heard of potential cuts to spending in the Budget are deeply concerning. I urge the Secretary of State to guarantee today that they will not happen.

Finally, I am afraid that there still seems to be nowhere near enough focus or urgency when it comes to care. We simply cannot fix the crisis in the NHS without fixing the crisis in care. Right now, more than 12,000 people in hospital are ready and well enough to go home but stuck there because the care they need is not available. That is awful for them and their families, and it is awful for the NHS that 12,000 beds that should be getting used by patients who need them and allowing better patient flow through hospitals are being held up because the care system is in crisis. I urge the Secretary of State again not to put this off any longer but to set up a cross-party commission now so that we can agree a long-term solution to ensure that people get the care they need, when and where they need it, and that carers are properly supported, too.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I support what the hon. Lady is saying about a having cross-party group look at social care, which is a sensible long-term thing that we need to do, and discharges from hospital are an important part of that. Does she agree that discharges from mental health units are also an important part of that? On a recent visit to Basildon hospital, I saw that discharges were not happening in mental health units. That is perhaps as much of an issue in mental health social care as it is in older people's social care, which the House is more attuned to.

Helen Morgan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. There is a general problem with care in the community of all types not being there for people. We have people in places where they will not get better as quickly—in some cases, their situation may be deteriorating—because that care is not available. Mental health provision in my constituency is absolutely appalling. People register with a doctor over the border just to access better mental health care. I could not agree with him more.

In conclusion, the Darzi report is shocking, but it is not surprising based on the experience of my constituents. Poor access to primary care—whether that is GPs, dentists or early mental health intervention—is leaving people in pain and distress. Long waiting lists and crumbling hospitals are leaving people unable to get back to work, with their situation deteriorating, and the crisis in social care—the elephant in the room—is depriving people of their independence and leaving them in hospital when they could be at home. The new Government must make fixing the NHS and care their No. 1 priority. Liberal Democrats will be here to provide constructive opposition to ensure that they do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Ben Goldsborough to make his maiden speech.

8.35 pm

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): It is a profound honour to rise as the newly elected Member of Parliament for South Norfolk. The privilege of representing the people of the constituency is not one that I take lightly. I look forward to working with colleagues across the House to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs addressed.

At the outset, I will take a moment to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr Richard Bacon, who served South Norfolk for over two decades. Mr Bacon's tireless commitment to the constituency—particularly his efforts to champion the cause of self-build homes—has left a lasting legacy. His work in advocating for those who wish to take control of their own housing future has empowered many in our region and across the country to realise their dreams of home ownership.

One of the joys of representing South Norfolk is the opportunity to stand up for its wonderfully unique places, each with a name as memorable as the community behind it. From Newton Flotman to Saxlingham Nethergate, Tacolneston and the intriguingly named Three Cocked Hat, our constituency is a patchwork of distinct and vibrant villages. It is often said in jest that things are “normal for Norfolk”—we all know what the connotations are—but I want to challenge that label. In fact, if we look closely at what is happening in South Norfolk, we will find it is anything but normal, but in the best sense of the phrase. We are home to some of the most cutting-edge research and innovation in the world, all based at the Norwich research park right in our own back yard. I was so pleased to hear what the Secretary of State said on innovation, science, and research and development because in South Norfolk we have organisations in those fields who will be delighted to hear it.

The Quadram Institute is at the forefront of research into our food science and gut health, shaping the future of nutrition and medicine. The John Innes Centre is

world renowned for its plant science and microbiology, the Sainsbury Laboratory continues to lead the way in plant pathology and molecular biology, and there is Tropic—an ambitious company that started in Norfolk which is engineering a new generation of tropical plants, resilient to both disease and looming threats from climate change. Its work is benefiting not just South Norfolk or even the UK; it is having a global impact, ensuring food security and agricultural sustainability for future generations. Heck, Tropic's work means that in three or more years, we may be eating bananas that were grown in Norfolk—not something that many people would have imagined. Far from being normal, South Norfolk is actually a hub of scientific innovation and global leadership in fields that define the future of our planet. Dare I say, this is something of which we can be tremendously proud.

It would be remiss of me not to mention another gem of South Norfolk: Lotus Cars, which is a symbol of British excellence in engineering. From its headquarters in Hethel, Lotus has been creating iconic sports cars for over 70 years, celebrated for their precision, innovation and performance. Lotus continues to push the boundaries of automotive engineering, with its latest models keeping South Norfolk at the cutting edge of global motorsport and design.

I recently had the privilege—perhaps the thrill—of being let loose on the Hethel test track with the stunning new Lotus Emira. That was my best Jeremy Clarkson impression, by the way. I will not be entering the British Grand Prix anytime soon; I can promise you that, Madam Deputy Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: “Shame!”] I know. I am pleased to report that both the car and myself, as a newly elected Member of Parliament, left the site entirely intact, much to the relief of the Lotus team, and probably that of local Labour organisers worried about another by-election.

The work done by Lotus is about not just fast cars but pioneering technology that has implications far beyond the racetrack. From lightweight materials to advanced aerodynamics, Lotus continues to be a leader in innovation that drives not only motorsport but the broader automotive industry.

One of the greatest privileges of representing South Norfolk is the opportunity to champion the incredible businesses, community groups and people who make it, in my humble opinion, the best place to live in the country. Let me start with Huggers in Long Stratton, a plant-based coffee shop—yes, you heard me right, and it does sell lovely food—that has taken the town by storm. The millionaire's shortbread cake there is the best and simply to die for.

Then there is Urban Jungle in Costessey, a haven for those with a love for the weird and wonderful in house plants and tropical plants. After all that plant shopping, Madam Deputy Speaker, you have to check out the fabulous coffee shop. Members may notice that there is a theme with some of these shops.

In Loddon, we have Rosy Lee's Tearoom, which is a real gem. It is like stepping into a tearoom run by your gran, basically—full of warmth, character and the best tea and cakes around—but more than that it is a hub for the community and a place that cared deeply for those in need during the covid-19 lockdowns, ensuring that no one was left behind in those difficult times. It truly embodies the best of us.

[Ben Goldsborough]

I also want to give a special mention to the Wymondham Community Outreach Project, which is run by Arnie and an incredible team of volunteers. They work tirelessly to ensure that those who are struggling to get by have access to food, clothing and—perhaps more importantly—friendship. Their fantastic book bank ensures that everyone has access to a good book, because they understand that nourishing the mind is just as important as nourishing the body.

Last but not means least is Spurgeons in Brooke. If anyone has not tried its sausage rolls yet, they are missing out, because they are truly extraordinary. The butcher there is second to none and its local produce is some of the best found anywhere in Norfolk. It is businesses like these and the people behind them that make South Norfolk such a vibrant, welcoming and thriving place to live. Each of them contributes to the fabric of our community, providing not just the goods and services but the places of connection and support that bring us together as neighbours and friends.

My values were forged in the heart of East Anglia, shaped by the lessons learned from my parents. My mum Sara, a hard-working shop worker, and my dad Wayne, a stable lad—yes, those jobs still exist in the 21st century—instilled in me principles that have guided my life, which I hope to bring to this House. They taught me the importance of honesty; of giving your all, no matter what the task; and of never losing sight of your aspirations. Perhaps most importantly, they taught me to treat people with respect, whether they are a colleague, a constituent or someone I have just met. These are the values that shaped me, and I pledge to uphold them and serve the people of South Norfolk with them.

As I take my seat in the House, I do so with a clear sense of responsibility and deep commitment to the people of the constituency. There are two areas that I am particularly passionate about and that will be at the forefront of my work in Parliament: standing up for the families of children with special educational needs and disabilities, and seeking much-needed improvements to our justice system.

First, supporting SEND families is a cause close to my heart. Far too often, families face unnecessary battles to secure the right support for their children. The system, which should be there to help, can sometimes feel like an obstacle put in their way, leaving parents exhausted and children without the resources they need to thrive. I will work tirelessly to push for reforms in SEND provision so that it is fair, timely and accessible. Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential and every family deserves to be heard, supported and empowered.

Secondly, I am deeply committed to the reform of our justice system. While we can be proud of many aspects of British justice, there are still serious issues that need to be addressed. Victims of crime too often feel let down by delays and an overburdened system, and communities are frustrated by the lack of swift and fair outcomes. I will work to ensure that our justice system prioritises victims' rights, tackles delays and restores public confidence. We must also ensure that rehabilitation and reformation are at the core of our system, so that those who have served their time have

real opportunities to contribute to society once more. These are the challenges that I intend to take with me on this journey through Parliament, and I look forward to working with colleagues across the House to make them a reality.

I believe that South Norfolk has a bright future, and I am eager to work with colleagues in Government to ensure we address the pressing issues of our time, from housing and infrastructure to education and healthcare. The people of South Norfolk deserve no less than our full commitment, and I pledge to give them just that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. As the Front-Bench contributions went on for so long, Back Benchers will now be limited to three minutes, and I ask that maiden speeches be limited to five minutes to squeeze in as many people as I can. I call a tieless Dr Luke Evans.

8.44 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have removed my neck collar, which I am allowed to do, but if Members see my head wobbling, I ask them to intervene and I will put it straight back on. I welcome the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough) to his place. With the respect that he talks about and commands, I am sure he will be an asset to the House.

I come to the debate with a slightly unique perspective, and three minutes is very little time to make my point. I have been a doctor since 2007; I sat on the Health and Social Care Committee for three years; and, most recently—and probably most obviously—I recently had spinal surgery on my neck. However, that is not my only foray into the NHS: I have had both knees and my shoulder operated on and my appendix out, and I ended up in intensive care with bilateral pneumonia after that, so I have seen a fair amount of it.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): The bionic man.

Dr Evans: Absolutely. In this debate, health is a political football. It always strikes me that there is a rising tide across the western world, and at the four points of the nation. In Scotland, the NHS is run by the SNP; in Wales, it is run by Labour; in Northern Ireland, it is also separate; and we had the Conservatives, who have now handed it over to Labour. All of them are struggling, and we would do well to remember that. I came into politics not to change the world but to solve that—that sounds cheesy. In my last two minutes I have a set of suggestions—as any good doctor would do, I will look at the short term, the mid term and the long term—to try to improve it.

We could start with a root and branch review into prescribing, which is one of the most wasteful things in the NHS. On top of that, it is worth looking at the European working time directive, which hampers doctors when they study. Overnight, that could increase the ability to see more patients by a couple of percentage points. I spent nine months waiting for my operation, and there were a number of appointment letters. I had the ability to understand them and work my way through them,

but a root and branch review of communications—the simple bread and butter of the NHS—would be very welcome. Comparable data across the nations, to see what goes on, is so important.

For the medium term, I would like statementing when people go into the NHS. Everyone knows how much it costs when they go to America—£40,000 for a ski accident. It costs that much here, and people would do well to remember that when they do not turn up to their appointments. On the IT system, we focus a lot on patients but I would like more focus on the staff and how they can use IT. I would like capping of GP lists—a sensible way, now that we have a workforce plan in place, to grow our staffing.

Finally, for the long term, in the 20 seconds I have I suggest a national service for SEND, taking education and health together to deal with mental health. Some 40% of the child and adolescent mental health services referrals in Leicestershire relate to autism and ADHD. That is a real problem that could easily be solved. In my final five seconds, I suggest an NHS centre for clinical excellence to share best practice. It is not good enough.

8.47 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall and Bloxwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans).

The report is a tour de force from Lord Darzi, and I thank him for his work. The Secretary of State rightly commissioned the report as a benchmark for future improvement. I was a member of the Health Committee from 2010 to 2015. Given the evidence we heard, there was no alternative but to pause the Bill—the Committee played an important role in that. Chapter 10 of the report sets out the structure. Lord Darzi points out that the 2012 Act was three times the size of the original Act setting up the NHS. The 2022 Act moved into integrated care, and in paragraph 15 on page 121, he raises some concerns about how the ICBs—integrated care boards—operate, and their accountability. Could there be a review into how they operate? Paragraph 37 highlights that trust chief executives' pay is based on the turnover of the organisation, which encourages trusts to "grow their revenue rather than to improve operational performance." Some are even paid more than the Prime Minister.

The flow of patients is important, which is where working with local authorities is so important. We can move planes around the world, but it seems we cannot move people out of hospital. The Select Committee visited Torbay, which was set up in 2009. We followed Mrs Smith from a single point of contact all the way through. As Lord Darzi said on page 77, collaboration is not the same as integration. On page 5, paragraph 13, he points out that too great a share of the money is spent in hospitals rather than in the community. On page 81, he said that "GP...contracts are complex" and doing the right thing for patients is the wrong thing for GP income. He said, "That cannot be right."

Our mantra should be "prevention, prevention, prevention". In our report, we said that public health should be moved into local authorities. As Lord Darzi said, health visitors are dropping. He also said that the NHS is missing an opportunity to intervene early. We had Sure Start, which is where health visitors were focused. He talked about clinical negligence. Some £2.9 billion—

1.7%—of the budget is spent on settling claims. Can the Secretary of State pursue the duty of candour and ask each trust to look at whether they can move cases into arbitration?

Sadly, disparities by ethnicity make very grim and sad reading. Paragraph 24 refers to the median age at death as 62 for white people, 40 for black people, 33 for Asian people and 30 for those from a mixed background. There was supposed to be a chart in the report, but it is not there. Will the Secretary of State look at producing it?

Lord Darzi's report gives the Secretary of State and the health team an important opportunity to re-set the NHS. It is the envy of the world and free at the point of use. As Lord Darzi said, we cannot afford not to have an NHS.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Monica Harding to make her maiden speech.

8.50 pm

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a true privilege to be standing here among the green Benches, not only as the Member for Esher and Walton but as the first Liberal MP for my constituency for over 100 years, and its first female MP.

The biggest issue on the doorstep in my constituency is undoubtedly the state of the NHS, so I am pleased to make my maiden speech in this debate. First, however, it would be remiss of me not to point out that Esher and Walton are only two of the towns I represent. My constituency also includes the Dittons, the Moleseys, Claygate, Hersham, Hinchley Wood and Oatlands. I am proud to have called it my home for almost 20 years and it is where I raised my four children.

My constituency is also the playground of the kings and queens of England. Esher and Walton spans the former hunting estate of Henry VIII, which stretched from Thames Ditton to Oatlands Palace, where his daughters Mary and Elizabeth sometimes resided and Charles I was imprisoned. As a result of Henry's forest, our constituency is almost 60% green-belt land. In the Government's planning reforms to provide the homes we desperately need, these areas must also be protected.

It was the ease of travel to London via the River Thames, when boats were faster than horses, which led the monarchs to Esher and Walton. Sometimes, our trains into London feel as slow as being on horseback. I look forward to pushing for improvements to our railways, but we are a river community. The Thames provides our border with London, and the chalk stream, the Mole, runs through our constituency and is now one of the most polluted rivers in England. My constituents are so exercised by the sewage pouring into our rivers that they have been explicit about sending me to this place to help sort it out.

Our rowing clubs share their disquiet, not least because they do not want their Olympians getting sick. Molesey boat club sent four members to Paris this year, as did Surbiton hockey club—it is actually in Long Ditton—which sent 11 and has over 1,000 youth players. Every weekend in Esher and Walton, grassroots youth football clubs gear up to welcome over 5,000 players registered. The great Walton and Hersham FC boasts the youngest owners in world football, and so interlinked is football

[Monica Harding]

in our community that the five Claygate Royals youth teams are named after Claygate's five pubs. We are a hub of children playing sport, which matters for their health and wellbeing, and that brings me back to the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you a story from my constituency. During the general election campaign, I met on the doorstep a couple unloading their car. I apologised for disturbing them as they were unpacking their shopping. "Not shopping," they replied, "We are unpacking our son's belongings. He died." They went on to tell me that this young 19-year-old man had taken his life while at university. "He met you," they told me. "He said he would vote for you because you were speaking out on mental health and special educational needs support for young people."

His mother told me that she counted herself lucky that she had managed to support her son for the years at school because she could afford interventions and therapy. She worried about those children stuck on NHS waiting lists unable to access the support that he had had. In Surrey, there are almost 7,000 children on mental health waiting lists, with average waits of almost eight months. I meet parents on the doorstep whose special needs children are at home, rather than at school, for months and sometimes years, sliding into depression because they cannot access adequate provision.

I promised that young man's mother that if I was elected I would continue to shine a light on this issue, and I can think of no better way to do so than in this debate. Our children and young people are in trouble, and we must fix it. As a start, we need to put mental health care on an equitable footing with care for physical health. In 2024, that is long overdue; let this new Parliament be the start of it.

I am, of course, very aware that I stand here on the anniversary of the 7 October attacks. I want to add my voice in remembering all those who have lost their lives or are still held hostage, and those across the region who are displaced and suffering or have been killed. As the new Liberal Democrat spokesperson on international development, I urge the Government to use all their levers to get humanitarian aid into the region as winter approaches. I will be pushing this House to renew our leadership in international development by restoring the 0.7% commitment of gross national income to UK aid.

My constituents are outward-looking. They are used to having a Foreign Secretary as an MP in my predecessor Dominic Raab, and I pay tribute to his work—particularly his introduction of the British National (Overseas) scheme, which my party had long called for and which has given my constituency a wonderful new British Hong Kong community. Following 15 years working overseas, I am committed to contributing to the resetting of our standing in the world, recognising our international obligations and participating fully in our international institutions, which will include restoring a closer relationship with our closest neighbour, Europe.

I bring to this House the brilliance of the people of Esher and Walton, and their struggle. As someone once said, politics done well changes lives. It saves lives too, and, in this still new Parliament, I intend, with hon. Members and Friends, to set to work.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Terry Jermy to make his maiden speech.

8.56 pm

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), and my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough), to whom I am physically close in the Chamber and geographically close back home in Norfolk.

I am delighted to be able to deliver my maiden speech as the new Member of Parliament for South West Norfolk. I have the pleasure of representing this fantastic part of the country—the place where I was born, and where I went to school and college, bought my first house, and started my business. Until a few years ago even keen political observers could have been forgiven for not quite knowing exactly where South West Norfolk was, but I can certainly pay tribute to my predecessor, the right honourable Liz Truss, for putting us firmly on the map.

Our largest market town is Thetford, where I am from and where I had the honour of serving as mayor. Some Members may be familiar with the popular "Dad's Army" series, which was largely filmed in Thetford—we are the original Walmington-on-Sea. If Members ever get the chance, the Dad's Army Museum is well worth a visit, and no trip to Thetford is complete without being photographed sitting next to our life-size Captain Mainwaring statue. There are a number of "Dad's Army" quotations that I am sure will be relevant to my role in this place. I have already said to myself many times, "Don't panic, don't panic!", but I sincerely hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do not give you cause to address me as "You stupid boy!"

South West Norfolk is beautiful. We have wide-open fields, forests and rivers, and a fantastic history. However, as in so many rural areas, under the surface there are challenges. I am acutely aware that one third of all children in South West Norfolk live in poverty, and there are parts that are in the top 10% for indices of multiple deprivation. Health inequalities persist, with Norfolk regarded as a dentistry desert. There is a crisis in adult social care, with far too many examples of poor-quality care provision. We have a mental health trust with long-standing challenges and placed in special measures, and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn is riddled with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, literally held up by more than 5,000 metal and wooden props. The challenges are stark, and these are some of the many issues on which I have pressed the Government and will continue to do so.

I think it is fair to say that I was not expecting to win my election. As a result, there are many people wondering, "Who is this person from South West Norfolk?" I do not come from a political family, but I care passionately about my local community, which is why I decided to put myself forward and join the local town council aged 22. I have taken advice and guidance from many fellow councillors over the years, but one lady in particular, Thelma Paines, mentored and guided me, and I owe much of my political upbringing to her. Sadly, Thelma passed away in 2022 and therefore did not see me reach this place, but I certainly would not be here without her encouragement and support. When she stood down as a

local councillor, she would still telephone regularly, with her customary, "Listen up, duck; I've got something to say."

While mentioning role models, I must take a moment to mention Baroness Gillian Shephard, our Member of Parliament from 1987 through to 2005. If there is one local MP I would like to emulate, it would be her—a fantastic example of a good constituency MP who was knowledgeable of the area and rooted in the community.

Being a Labour councillor in rural Norfolk can be tough. Fortunately for me, I had family on my side—yes, of course with support and encouragement, but I had an advantage over my rivals. My dad was the youngest of 13, and my mum had seven brothers. With nearly 40 aunts and uncles, and over 100 cousins, I am sure that I owe at least my first election victory to my grandparents' love for one another and the resulting votes some years later.

It is because of my experiences with my own family and, more specifically, with my father that I made the decision to switch from being a local government candidate to standing for the first time in a national election. It is entirely appropriate, but also somewhat difficult for me, that I find myself here today delivering my maiden speech in a debate about our NHS. In 2013 my dad, Trevor Jermy, had a life-altering stroke aged just 55. He was an engineer. He worked hard from the day he left school at 15 and became an accomplished welder fabricator. Frankly, there was not much that my dad could not fix.

Strokes come in all shapes and sizes. My dad, having shown no warning signs, suffered a major stroke. The physical aspects were painfully easy to see and difficult for a man so used to using his hands, but there was psychological damage too. As a family, we saw up close and over a number of years the awfulness of the current process for applying for personal independence payments, dehumanising work capability assessments and how little we as a country value the contribution of carers. Disabled people and their families continue to come under repeated attack, most recently in Norfolk with changes to the minimum income guarantee.

After 10 further years with my dad, he became unwell. We tried to get him a GP appointment, which, as for so many, was difficult. When we eventually managed to get him in front of a doctor, he was sent straight to A&E with pneumonia. Then he contracted covid. The pneumonia, combined with covid, was too much for his already fragile state, and he was placed in a medically induced coma. As a family, we spent every day for the following two months visiting my dad in intensive care at West Suffolk hospital. Because of the infection risk, he was in a quarantined room and only one of us was allowed in each day for a maximum of an hour, and in full personal protective equipment. His 65th birthday passed, as did Christmas and new year. When the time came to try to wake him, we were devastated to discover that he had had a further stroke while in the coma. Some more weeks passed, but my dad never regained the cognitive and physical abilities that he had just a few months earlier, and he passed away on 29 January 2023, aged just 65.

During the long time that my dad spent in hospital, I saw painfully up close so much of our NHS. I saw ambulances routinely queuing up, the accident and emergency department always busy, and the hospital

buildings looking old and tired. I saw how few staff were available during the week, and at weekends the situation was worse. I saw how his catheter bag was left for longer than it should have been, and of course, I saw the impact of this whole nightmare on my mother and the rest of our family. It was at that point that I decided that enough was enough and that, if I could, I should try to do something about it. That is when I decided to stand—not particularly because I wanted to win, but because I wanted to raise the issues. I wanted someone to acknowledge how bad things had become and how we could not carry on like this.

I have been struck by the majesty of this place since I was elected; it is utterly awe-inspiring, and I do not think I will ever quite get used to it. For all the pomp and the politics, this role carries with it a huge burden and a huge opportunity. We cannot fail to succeed. We must do better. We must at all times remember why we are here, because people in this country, particularly the most vulnerable, are absolutely relying on us to succeed, and I hope to do what I can to make their lives that little bit better.

9.4 pm

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): May I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding) on her deeply affectionate speech? Her constituency is a place that is close to my heart, my grandparents having resided in Claygate for a number of years. I also congratulate the hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy), and I am sure his father would be hugely proud of how he spoke with great affection for his home constituency.

On 5 July this year, 76 years to the day since the NHS came into being, my mother was involved in a serious road traffic accident. But for the skill and care of the health service, she may well not have survived. Many of those who cared for her were my former colleagues in the major trauma service at University Hospitals Birmingham. I know that the care they provided was not an exception; it was not a case of going a little further for a former colleague. No, this was yet another example of the brilliant and dedicated care that our healthcare professionals provide every day.

While we rightly acknowledge and praise the endeavours of all our healthcare workers, we must not put the NHS on such a pedestal that it becomes a sacred cow. While we can all appreciate the hard work and dedication of our NHS staff, it would be unwise and a mistake to construe those same workers and the institution as one and the same thing. There is a real risk that such a religious fervour develops around the institution of the NHS that its growth and development are stifled. We have reached a point where any constructive criticism of the organisation is deemed to be levelling the same criticism at the staff who keep the wheels grinding through every shift.

The NHS was built to provide episodic acute care. Now it is heavily dominated by the management and treatment of chronic conditions. The hospital-centric model that presently exists is arguably outdated, and a paradigm shift to a more preventive, community-based model should be pursued. For far too long it has been the workforce who have risen to the challenge, rather than the organisational structure itself. The principle that our health service should care for everyone regardless

[Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst]

of their personal wealth is profoundly important. To undermine that would be to disrupt the foundations upon which it is built. However, we would be doing the NHS a disservice if we failed to have an honest debate about how we improve it.

In the short time that I have remaining, I wish to raise the issue of the over-centralisation of decision making. We have ended up in a position where clinicians and managers on the frontline are less empowered and trusted to make decisions and deliver for their patients. Too many decisions are made at the centre, which leads to overly complicated and often conflicting layers of approval and process. Ultimately, by enabling risk to be held by other parts of the system, local decision makers will be more empowered, decisions will be made in a more timely manner and a greater sense of trust will be established.

9.8 pm

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Members from across the House will have their own experience of the NHS, but in my case, after caring for my late sister Margaret, who was diagnosed with a glioblastoma brain tumour in 2021, I can say with regret that the NHS failed her, forcing us to travel to Germany when she was at her sickest in order to find some treatment that might extend her life.

In his summary letter published before the report, Lord Darzi told us that he was “shocked” by what he had found, but the 3,200 people who are diagnosed with a glioblastoma brain tumour every year are not shocked. They know just how bad things are. The report has told us that the UK has higher cancer death rates than our European neighbours. For patients with a glioblastoma brain tumour, that is news to no one. In comparison to 33 similar countries, the UK ranks 25th for five-year survival rates. Life expectancy for somebody diagnosed with a glioblastoma is just nine months. There has not been a new treatment in the NHS for more than 30 years, and the diagnosis is still a death sentence.

In 2018, after Tessa Jowell sadly passed away with a glioblastoma, £40 million of ringfenced Government funding was promised for brain tumour research. Of that £40 million, just £11.3 million has been spent. Six years on, and the National Institute for Health and Care Research cannot even get the money out of the door. That is a real failure of Government. In June 2024, just before the election, a roundtable discussed how to spend £15 million of this money, and I have been trying to find out what it decided. Last week, I received a letter from Professor Lucy Chappell, the NIHR’s chief scientific adviser. Disturbingly, she told me that the NIHR largely funds research based on the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money and scientific quality, but it does not “allocate funding for specific disease areas.”

The pharmaceutical industry does not work on glioblastoma. If the NHS also does not, who will? Do we keep on baking cakes?

9.11 pm

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): I have worked in healthcare for most of my career and, as I said in my maiden speech, I think we need an honest

discussion with the public about how we fund, provide and deliver healthcare in England. I worked in the NHS for seven years prior to my election, and I worked every day to improve clinical outcomes and patient care, including in the surgical hubs mentioned by the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins).

I can assure the House that, although it has significant challenges, the NHS also has significant opportunities, including the opportunity for us to reshape it not only to meet the needs of today but to ensure its survival for future generations. Lord Darzi’s report, like many others, makes it clear that, although it is not broken, the NHS is at a tipping point. His report is wide-ranging, but it could not cover everything. For example, post-natal female care received little attention, but it is essential to ensuring a universal standard of post-birth care for mothers and children.

Despite significant investment from the previous Government, we must be honest with the public not only about the true state of the health service, both nationally and locally, but about the difficult choices that lie ahead. First, we need to rethink how we deliver healthcare closer to home and more efficiently. Expanded partnerships with the private sector, whether in diagnostics, elective surgery or mental health services, can relieve some of the burden on NHS facilities. By fostering public-private partnerships, we can enhance capacity and efficiency while ensuring that the NHS remains free at the point of use.

Technology and innovation are essential to transforming the NHS. Artificial intelligence, digital records and telemedicine have enormous potential to improve outcomes and reduce costs, but the NHS lags behind in digital transformation—the catastrophe of Labour’s IT system casts a long shadow.

Equally, we must have an honest conversation about patient choice and responsibility. The NHS has historically promised to be everything to everyone, but we must ask ourselves if this is realistic. Encouraging patient choice could drive competition and improve service delivery, but we also need to ask patients to take greater responsibility for managing their health, particularly in areas such as preventive care and chronic disease management.

Finally, funding is key to this debate. For too long we have relied on promises of increased funding without fully grappling with how we can sustainably finance the NHS. More money is part of the solution, but where should that money come from? I want an NHS that is free at the point of use, but we need to explore social insurance models, encourage private investment or potentially increase taxes. These are tough questions, but they must be answered. We need a radical rethink of NHS bureaucracy.

In conclusion, although the NHS is one of the major achievements of our time, now is the time to take action to reform it.

9.14 pm

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough), and for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy), and the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), on their wonderful maiden speeches.

I first wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Richard Graham. Richard represented Gloucester and its residents for 14 years, and I thank him for his service. In the last Parliament, he worked to make spiking a specific criminal offence—something I am proud that this Government will deliver.

It is the most incredible privilege to stand here on behalf of Gloucester residents and to make my maiden speech in this debate, and it is particularly appropriate for three reasons. First, my local NHS hospital, Gloucestershire Royal, has played an important part in my family's life. It was where my wife and I spent our first night with our little boy, who turns one later this month. I have also spent much of my professional career representing NHS trusts up and down the country, and I have heard at first hand some of the challenges they face, particularly in the recruitment and retention of frontline key workers, to whom I am sure we all owe a personal debt of gratitude. It is also appropriate because I know how many families in my constituency are struggling to get the NHS care they need and will recognise many of the findings in Lord Darzi's report. Seeing a GP, going to the dentist for a check-up or arriving at A&E in an ambulance and going straight through the doors—those might seem like the basic requirements of a functioning health service, but for my constituents they have become a luxury.

Gloucester is a city rich with potential. We are a city small in size but giant in stature. We have a proud history stretching back to the Roman colonia of Glevum, one of the administrative capitals of Roman Britain. We are one of only three cities in the UK to have hosted a coronation, and our mighty cathedral soars above the city skyline. Younger Members of the House will recognise the cathedral's cloisters as part of the magical world of Hogwarts, while older Members may recognise our city and our tailor as part of the magical world of another famous Potter—Beatrix.

Last month, we celebrated Gloucester Day, which marks the end of the siege of Gloucester, in which our city stood tall when all hope appeared lost. You can still find brilliant examples of our wonderful heritage across the city, perhaps on a visit to the Folk of Gloucester or on a tour with the Gloucester Civic Trust. We also have a proud military history, from the Glorious Glosters to RAF Quedgeley, which is now Kingsway; and our historic docks, recently designated a heritage harbour by the Maritime Heritage Trust, are home to the brilliant Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum.

Gloucester also stands out as a place of great innovations: the vacuum cleaner, the ferris wheel, the first jet aircraft and, of course, Viennetta were all pioneered in our great city. But our potential to be great is not confined to the history books—and no, I am not just talking about the country's finest rugby team, Gloucester-Hartpury, who have won the premiership women's rugby title two years in a row. The seeds of change were sown in recent years—first under Parmjit Dhanda, Richard's Labour predecessor, and then under Richard—with the regeneration of the Quays, the Forum and the exciting new university campus, which is due to open next year. But we can and we must go further; plans for the redevelopment of Podsmead and Matson must be brought to life, and brownfield sites across the city turned into the social housing of the future. This Government's mission to get Britain building can and should unlock our city's potential.

However, it is not in development that our city's greatest potential lies; that potential is, of course, in our people—the brilliant people of Gloucester, who are community-minded, fiercely proud and quite happy to tell me exactly what they are thinking. As the new MP for Gloucester, I know that although potential is found in all residents in our city, opportunity is not. I entered politics because I see the potential of every child in Gloucester, and I want to fight to ensure that opportunities like the ones I had growing up in a working-class family under the last Labour Government are open to every single family like mine in our city. When I visit schools in my constituency, I see the next generation of solar and wind engineers, the next cohort of developers and cyber-security experts, and the carers, nurses and doctors who will look after me when I am old.

Gloucester is a diverse city, with over 70 different languages spoken on Barton Street alone—a city that stood united during the uprising of racism and Islamophobia we saw elsewhere in the country this summer—but more needs to be done. At a recent meeting of the Gloucestershire Race Collective, I promised to use my position in this House to give voice to the concerns of our diverse communities in Gloucester, and to work with this Government to tackle rising levels of racism and Islamophobia in our country.

As I work with this Government to deliver on their mission to provide opportunities for everyone in my constituency, regardless of their background, I hope that those opportunities will strengthen the already incredible bonds that bring our city together. Those bonds are best demonstrated by some of the amazing community organisations and charities working in our city, like Gloucestershire Gateway Trust, whose Bridging the Gap programme helps break down barriers to work and gets local people into sustainable employment; like Gloucester Feed the Hungry, whose warm welcome, hot coffee and delicious samosas put a smile on the faces of so many in our city; and like the Holly Gazzard Trust, which is tackling domestic abuse and stalking, turning that family's personal tragedy into a safer future for all. There are many more such organisations—I could go on all day, but I am conscious of time—that demonstrate the very best of our city: a community that is driven to help others to achieve their potential.

In closing, I make a simple promise to the constituents of Gloucester and the community that I am so proud to serve: I will work tirelessly to deliver a better future for our city. It will be a future in which everyone can access the NHS care they need and every child has the opportunity to thrive; a future that celebrates our heritage, our potential, our diversity and our community—our Gloucester.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Ian Sollom to make his maiden speech.

9.20 pm

Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gloucester (Alex McIntyre) on an excellent maiden speech. He packed an awful lot into just over five minutes and set the bar very high for me. I am aware that I am being watched by you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is an immense honour and hugely humbling to address the House for the first time as the first ever MP for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire. The new

[*Ian Sollom*]

constituency perfectly encompasses the heart of Cambridgeshire. It has countryside that includes some of the most fertile farmland in the UK and the rich ecology at the edge of the fens. It mixes ancient and rural villages with new towns and new communities—and, of course, there is the magnificent market town of St Neots, the largest town in Cambridgeshire. It is a source of great pride that our town has been recognised in the name of a constituency for the first time. Having been entrusted with making that newfound recognition count, I am sure that the House will appreciate hearing a great deal more about St Neots from me over the coming years.

St Neots, which sits alongside the Great North Road, gained its name as a site of pilgrimage. We have welcomed visitors throughout the centuries. In recent times, the whole constituency has gained a proud record of welcoming those who have chosen to make it their home, particularly those who moved from the London overspill to St Neots and the new village of Bar Hill in the 1960s. There are also more recent major developments on the eastern edge of St Neots and the northern edge of Cambridge. There is the new town of Cambourne, which celebrates its 25th birthday this year, and the even newer town of Northstowe, which will become the largest new town in the UK since Milton Keynes. It is exciting to see new residents shaping vibrant communities, creating new traditions and supporting each other.

In a very literal sense, these new communities are why I am here, representing a new constituency, and why I pay tribute not to one predecessor but three: Jonathan Djanogly, Lucy Frazer and Anthony Browne. They all served the communities in my constituency that they represented with dedication and commitment, and served our national interest as, at various times, Members of the Government.

My being here also starkly highlights some incongruities of growth in Cambridgeshire. In creating my constituency, and taking the number of Members representing Cambridgeshire and Peterborough from seven to eight, Parliament has deployed more democratic resources to Cambridgeshire. However, many other resources remain unchanged or lag far behind where they ought to be, whether that is funding for the police, fire and rescue services, education, social or council services or, most pertinently in this debate, health services.

Lord Darzi's report pulls no punches in articulating the dire state of the national health service, but in St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire, the problems are exacerbated by a funding model that has taken little account of the growth in our population. That is felt most acutely in primary care services; it is really challenging to get access to GPs and dentists. I urge the Secretary of State to put that right at the earliest opportunity. Moreover, I urge him to follow Lord Darzi's recommendations by piloting new, innovative multidisciplinary models for neighbourhood care in the NHS in our new communities in St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire. Such innovation is something that my constituency would surely welcome, and as a scientist by training, I would welcome it, too.

I have focused in this speech on my constituency and my constituents, because it is my greatest source of pride to represent them here, but my background in physics—I have a PhD in cosmology—is something

that I am also proud to bring to this role, even if I did think that I had left the study of black holes behind me some time ago. I am of course already the longest-serving member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire, but I hope that the dedication, integrity and judgment with which I have pledged to serve my constituents will see me hold that record for a considerable time to come, making a real difference to the people of my constituency, and working with Members across this House to make a difference to the whole of the UK.

9.25 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Is a real pleasure to follow the new hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom). I am sure that he will be a rising star on the Liberal Democrat Benches. It is a pleasure to follow all hon. Members who have made their maiden speech today.

I am really grateful for the analysis that Lord Darzi has set out for us. The NHS has never been under such duress, nor have its staff, but following a diagnosis, we need a prescription. That is what I want to talk about today. We live in an ageing society, and while we celebrate the medical advances since Labour was last in power—in diagnostics, treatments, digital and technology—we know the urgency with which we need to apply them. Transformation has to be central to the agenda. I congratulate the Secretary of State on his focus on the NHS bringing about the transformation that is needed.

However, before we can look at that, we need to look at the financial flows in the NHS, which are not working, and the governance structures. I am not talking about reorganisation; I am talking about having one controlling mind in the right place in the service, overseeing the system. At the moment, there is too much focus on secondary care. That is sucking resources and work into that part, and driving inefficiency. Moving services into primary care is the key to unlocking the productivity and savings that are needed. It will improve health as well.

In the short time that I have, let me point to two examples in my community. First, in mental health, 30 Clarence Street is set up to be open access, so that there are no more long queues to see mental health practitioners, and multidisciplinary, with the public sector and the voluntary sector working hand in hand to meet people's needs. I invite the Secretary of State to come and see that service, because it is what we should be doing across our NHS. Two more hubs are to be set up in my constituency, leading the way on mental health. Then there is the work of Nimbuscare in primary care settings; it is pulling out from the NHS all the services that do not need to be in the secondary part. It is unplugging the backlog at the front door of the health service, while ensuring that we are looking after people at the back door. That is the transformation that our health service truly needs. I wanted to share those examples, and set out how they can be extended to build the NHS of the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Susan Murray to make her maiden speech.

9.28 pm

Susan Murray (Mid Dunbartonshire) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. It is a pleasure to speak after the many

excellent maiden speeches we have heard, including from the hon. Members for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough) and for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy), my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), the hon. Member for Gloucester (Alex McIntyre) and my hon. Friend the Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom). That took a bit of time, but it is important that those excellent speeches are acknowledged. I enjoyed listening to them all.

It is a great privilege for me to stand here today representing Mid Dunbartonshire, and the communities that are close to my heart. I have lived there for 30 years, and it is where both my sons went to school. Mid Dunbartonshire is in Scotland, in case Members had not noticed. It is a new constituency, following boundary changes this year. It sits 100% inside the East Dunbartonshire council area, as did the old constituency of East Dunbartonshire, but it now includes Lennoxton and Milton of Campsie to the north and some of Lenzie to the east. I am delighted that these towns are now in the constituency I represent, but my sorrow is that it does not include Kirkintilloch East and Twechar, which are also dear to my heart and where I have been a councillor since 2017. I am sure that the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch (Katrina Murray) will look after the community there, and it was good to hear her highlight the problems with local bus services in her maiden speech.

It goes without saying that Mid Dunbartonshire is the best constituency in the UK. Local towns are regularly promoted as the best place to live in the UK—Bearsden in 2021 and Kirkintilloch in 2024—and in 2017 “Woman’s Hour” revealed East Dunbartonshire as the best place in Britain for women to live. Incidentally, that was when Jo Swinson began her third term as the Liberal Democrat MP for East Dunbartonshire, so I thank Jo for all her work in the constituency. I also want to recognise her successor, Amy Callaghan, and particularly the personal challenges that Amy overcame during her time as an MP. She has shown such courage in her service to the community, and I wish her well in the future. I also thank Stuart McDonald, who was the MP for the newer part of the constituency. I know that he is held in very high regard and with much affection in that area.

I am pleased to speak in the debate on Lord Darzi’s report, because I know only too well the challenges that individuals and families have to face when our health lets us down. In 2006 my husband had a brain haemorrhage, which changed our lives in an instant. I became his full-time carer and could not continue in my profession, and he was never able to return to his career. From being comfortably off, life changed to watching every penny. Without the support of our family, we could have lost our home, and we were very fortunate. Friends and our community helped me to survive and get on with life. I cannot praise NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde enough. My husband spent months getting well enough to come home from hospital. Perhaps we were lucky with the timing, because at that time the excellent, talented and caring staff had the resources, which I have seen decline ever since.

I worked in the NHS before a career in medical marketing. I know the NHS from working in it and with it, and from my experience of visiting my husband. Latterly, I have been aware of the integration of health and social care through my role on the council. I know

the pressures that good, kind, caring professionals are under to become as efficient as possible, and they are absolutely doing their best.

Looking back, that was the beginning of my involvement in politics. I was thrown into the space that our society refers to as “community”. I know why it is important for Government to fund local authorities and communities and to give them real power. They prevent costs to the NHS every day by stopping the revolving door of treatment, discharge home and relapse back into treatment, and they support self-care and wellbeing. They are our CPS—not the Crown Prosecution Service, but our community prevention service, which pays back investment in spades by preventing costs.

What makes Mid Dunbartonshire special is its people and communities. Like in other places, during covid the community stepped up to support each other, and groups are still helping with shopping and patient transport. There are groups of volunteers fighting climate change, reducing social isolation, providing mental health support and peer support, supporting carers, providing financial advice, helping with housing problems, looking after community buildings, preserving our heritage, knitting for peace, and promoting fair trade, performance art and more—tackling problems at home and internationally. Mid Dunbartonshire people care and take action. From listening to other maiden speeches, I know that that is happening all over the UK. Liberal Democrats want to harness that power for good.

One message that came across loud and clear on the doorstep was that residents in Mid Dunbartonshire are tired of voting against things; they want to vote positively for things. Thomas Muir of Huntershill in Bishopbriggs was a famous son of Mid Dunbartonshire. At the end of the 18th century, he was a strenuous advocate of equal representation of the people in the House of the people, where I stand today. He said:

“I have devoted myself to the cause of the people. It is a good cause. It shall ultimately prevail. It shall finally triumph.”

The fight for fair votes prompted revolution at the end of the 18th century, and Thomas Muir was found guilty of sedition and transported to Australia for his efforts. In the 19th century, it took three reform Acts of this House to slowly extend voting rights for men. In the 20th century, the Representation of the People Act 1918 gave voting rights to some women and to men aged over 21. But it was not until 1928 that all adults had the right to vote. Today, in the 21st century, the call for better democracy continues.

The turnout in Mid Dunbartonshire at the last election was almost 72%, but many constituencies had a turnout in the low 40 per cents. The result shows a clear failure to engage a huge number of voters. I call on the Government to consider carefully the mandate that the result gave them, to treat every potential voter with dignity and respect, and to make the change to give every vote an equal weight, no matter where it is cast. This is an opportunity to end self-serving and self-obsessed politics, and to truly introduce the politics of service.

I will join my colleagues in this place in scrutinising Government proposals and working constructively with them to improve the quality of life for my constituents and all residents of the UK who make up the rich diversity of our communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Luke Murphy to make his maiden speech.

9.37 pm

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to deliver my maiden speech as the Member of Parliament for Basingstoke. I congratulate the hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today, not least my hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy). His dad would be very proud.

I recognise the work of my predecessor, Dame Maria Miller, who represented Basingstoke for 19 years. Dame Maria was the first woman to be elected to Parliament in north Hampshire, and she worked hard to see more women sitting on these green Benches and to promote women in all walks of life. Nationally, as Minister for Women and Equalities, and as Chair of the Select Committee on Women and Equalities, she worked to champion shared parental leave, flexible working and support for transgender rights.

In the early hours of Friday 5 July, Basingstoke made another first by voting for change and returning its first ever Labour Member of Parliament. That is not a privilege that I will ever take lightly or for granted, but it is one that I am committed to making the most of for the constituents, town and villages that I represent—and for the country, too. I will support the new Labour Government in delivering the change that people voted for, not least on the subject that we debate today: our NHS.

Nor is this a privilege that I would ever have expected growing up. It is true that my grandparents rubbed shoulders with Members of this House and the other place—including Harold and Mary Wilson, one of Mr Speaker's predecessors, and various Lords and Ladies—but that was because my grandparents cleaned the mansion blocks in which they lived on Victoria Street. I hope to do Bessy and John Murphy and Elsie French proud. It is because of their extraordinary hard work and that of my parents, Liz and Sean—a carpenter and an IT manager who left school at 15 with no qualifications—that I have been able to make it to this House today.

My parents' hard work and dedication to my sister's and my education ensured that we were the first in our family to go to university, and we have both sought to ensure through public service that others are offered the same opportunities. My sister Jude served as an Army officer, doing two tours of Afghanistan, and now I am serving as the first ever Labour MP for Basingstoke, because I have always believed that it is Labour Governments who have done the most to ensure opportunity for all. I firmly believe that people in Basingstoke voted for their first Labour MP this year for the same reason that so many people chose to move to our town and the surrounding villages: because they sought better opportunities for themselves and their families.

Basingstoke has long been favoured as a place to move to for families and businesses alike because of its location and good transport links. Around the town, the constituency boasts delightful countryside and picturesque villages such as North Waltham, Deane, Oakley, Steventon, Malshanger and Wootton St Lawrence, and it has a long and proud history. Our market, held every Wednesday, was fixed by a royal charter over 800 years ago. The town had an important role in the

civil war, with Oliver Cromwell himself turning up to end a siege, and Jane Austen danced at assemblies held locally. She would no doubt have been proud of the work of fiction we heard from the Opposition Benches earlier, though I doubt she ever had to undertake such a rapid edit of a piece of work as I have this evening.

Basingstoke has also suffered moments of notoriety. In the late 1600s, it was for burying the same woman alive twice—a lesson for us all in this House to never write off our opponents, lest they make a stunning comeback—but it was the Basingstoke riots of 1881 that made national news, after a group rioted against processions of the Salvation Army because they feared its clampdown on what it called the demon drink. Those riots led one newspaper to describe Basingstoke as a

“benighted little town which appears to be chiefly inhabited by a race of barbarians”.

That episode perhaps provides some valuable lessons for today: do not believe everything you read in the papers, and consider any public health measures wisely. I am sure the Health Secretary is listening keenly.

Since the 1960s and the planned London overspill, Basingstoke has been transformed almost beyond recognition from the old market town. Now effectively a thriving new town, Basingstoke is home to many significant businesses and world-class employers including the AA and Eli Lilly, but it is not just the big players: from renewable energy start-ups such as Tomato Energy to independent coffee shops and restaurants such as Willows and the Gabardine, thousands of small businesses form the backbone of our economy, powered by the institutions that are shaping the minds of tomorrow, including Queen Mary's college and Basingstoke college of technology.

One of the key strengths of Basingstoke is its sense of community and the diversity within the town. We have vibrant and active Hindu, Nepali and Irish communities, and that strong community spirit is also evident in the incredible work of our local charities and voluntary organisations, such as Home-Start, Basingstoke NeighbourCare and the Café Dome. It is their passion, dedication and generosity that make Basingstoke such a special place to live, and I pledge to support their efforts in any way I can.

Nowhere will I work harder than in support of our NHS, the subject of our debate today. I have seen at first hand the power of the NHS and the increasing strain, mismanagement and decline of the past 14 years. My dad has relied on the NHS for almost his entire life: diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 17, he has suffered with complex and chronic illness, especially in recent years. I have seen the NHS at its best, saving his life twice after two stays in intensive care just last year. I will always be grateful for the care that the doctors, nurses and other NHS staff gave him, but after many hospital visits, I have also seen how much the system struggles to cope with providing high-quality care for people with multiple long-term conditions.

In the election campaign, no issue was more prominent in my conversations with voters in Basingstoke than their being denied the health service that they rightly believe they deserve. I am proud of this Government's focus on building an NHS fit for the future, and I want to restore the fundamental promise of the NHS for everyone in Basingstoke: that it will be there when we

need it. Securing the return of the family doctor is a popular and much-needed policy locally, and I mean to ensure that we deliver it, just as I will continue to campaign for the delivery of our much-needed new hospital.

As a Labour MP, my guiding principle will be to fulfil the promise of this Labour Government in restoring opportunity for all, whether that is through the NHS, education or tackling climate change. Opportunity is why so many people have made Basingstoke their home over the years, it is why they voted Labour for the first time just over three months ago and it is what my parents and grandparents worked so hard for, for my sister and me. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak today, and I thank the people of Basingstoke for giving me my opportunity to serve.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Adrian Ramsay, who has two minutes, and I can then squeeze in one more speaker.

9.45 pm

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the new hon. Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) and hear about his pride in his constituency.

Our NHS provides amazing life-saving, dedicated care every day, but we also know that people are too often let down. Too many patients languish, often in pain, on long waiting lists. In rural constituencies such as mine, people often have to travel lengthy distances to access treatment. Lord Darzi points to systemic and chronic under-investment caused by austerity in funding and capital starvation. Resilience was stripped from the NHS before covid, and we owe it to those whose lives were lost or changed forever by the pandemic never to repeat these same mistakes and to do things differently. However, the Chancellor's arguments about tough decisions and a black hole of £22 billion are alarmingly similar to those made by the previous Government. It is good to see the Chancellor signalling some movement on fiscal rules, and I hope this logic will apply to supporting our public services, which are a crucial investment in our future.

Putting wellbeing at the heart of what we do should help us navigate how we support the NHS. Bad planning, poor housing, weak transport and divisive social policies have a huge impact on health outcomes, for example. So I welcome the Secretary of State's comments and he has been bullish about reform, but he has not been specific about exactly what he means by private sector involvement in the delivery of NHS services. There are real reasons to keep delivery of the NHS public, and not to outsource it to private providers. The Secretary of State has made statements about using the private sector to reduce waiting lists, but he has not explained whether he considers this to be a short-term plan while the NHS is being rebuilt, or a permanent policy. Lord Darzi's diagnosis was helpful and the emphasis on prevention is hugely welcome, but to deliver it we require bold action and investment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Thank you so much, but please be seated.

9.47 pm

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): Fixing the NHS is our great task and our solemn promise, for there is much to fix after 14 years of managed chaos and decline under the neglectful eyes of our mostly absent predecessors. The candid assessment of the state of the NHS from Lord Darzi is truly alarming, and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, it presents an accurate diagnosis of our difficulties. The report makes clear many of the problems of resources, management and structure, but today I would like to speak up for medical research, of which this country has such a proud record.

We all know of the catastrophic potential of infection, witnessed so very recently during the covid pandemic. Indeed, like many of us new Members, I too caught covid right here in this House in the crush to hear the King's Speech. I do hope that hon. Members of a certain age, such as myself, will remember to get vaccinated. However, let us remember Jenner, who devised vaccination, Lister, who pioneered antiseptics, and Fleming, who discovered penicillin. These British scientists leading the fight against infection were probably responsible for saving more lives than any other people in the long history of medicine.

Last week, we learned of the first successful trials from Oxford of vaccines for ovarian cancer, and we will see many amazing advances in the year to come. Today, we can be excited about molecular genetics, artificial intelligence and the huge power of our people's NHS data to unravel so many of the mysteries of modern medicine. I know that our Government will develop bold plans to repair the embattled NHS, but on this day I urge our brilliant new Government to pledge to do their utmost to support vital NHS medical research, which carries such promise.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Thank you so much, but you must not continue speaking when I am standing. I call the shadow Minister.

9.49 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I am mindful of the need to be brief, but I wish to congratulate the hon. Members for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough), for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy), for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), for Gloucester (Alex McIntyre), for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom), for Mid Dunbartonshire (Susan Murray), and for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) on excellent maiden speeches.

When I first heard that the Government had commissioned Lord Darzi to conduct a report on the NHS I wondered two things: why has this report been commissioned, and why has a former Labour Minister been asked to do it? The answer to the first question is still somewhat unclear after this debate. Much of the information is publicly available, and Labour had access to the civil service for six months before the general election, as is routine to help with planning. Before the election, in its manifesto Labour claimed to have a plan, and the Secretary of State said that he and the Government have a 10-year plan to reform and modernise the NHS. In the draft speech that I brought to this debate I was going to say that I assume that is the case, so where is

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

that plan and when will it be published, but during the debate the Secretary of State said that he will soon meet to engage with patients and staff who will write the plan. Does it exist, or is it yet to be written? Given that Lord Darzi specifies that policy suggestions are outside the remit of his report, and notwithstanding the amount of time and dedication he has put into it, what primary purpose does it serve? Is it simply a political statement to cover the right hon. Gentleman's plan and an increase in taxes in the Budget when it comes?

Ben Coleman (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Johnson: I will not because there is not much time. A potential answer to the second question of why a former Labour Minister has been asked to conduct the report is its silence on a number of issues, for example on increasing the number of medical students. I could not find any reference in the report to the five additional medical schools that were commissioned and opened by the former Conservative Government, and whose first new doctors have recently graduated. Indeed, I found no mention of the NHS workforce plan at all.

My constituency mailbag, no doubt much like that of Members across the House, is full of letters from elderly people who are frightened that their homes will be cold this winter, and that they will become ill, or perhaps even die, as a result. It is notable—again, perhaps this answers my second question—that despite being published two months after the Government's announcement about the winter fuel allowance, the Darzi report appears to be silent on the subject. The chief medical officer said that,

“cold homes and fuel poverty are directly linked to excess winter deaths”

in his annual report from 2023. Is it remarkable that this report by a former Labour Minister does not mention cold homes? Perhaps it does not recognise the impact of such a decision because no impact assessment has been made.

On 29 July, I asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate she had made of the impact that her winter fuel payment changes would have on the NHS. Her answer implied to me that that was something that had not been given enough consideration. On 5 September I submitted a written question to the Secretary of State, asking whether he would make an assessment of the winter fuel payment changes on a range of factors relating to the NHS and the health of elderly people, including hospital admissions, deaths, GP appointments and so on. The answer to whether he will do something or not is clearly “yes”, “no”, or “I have already done it”, but it seems the Government struggled to answer that question and I would be grateful if the Minister could do so today: will the Secretary of State make an assessment of the various effects of the changes to the winter fuel allowance and the consequent cold homes on the NHS and the health of elderly people?

Earlier, the Secretary of State said that investment without reform would reduce productivity. He even said that it was “killing with kindness.” Actions, however, speak louder than words, so what substantial productivity

gains come with the junior doctors' 22% pay rise? None. What productivity benefits arise from a significant increase in the wages for train drivers? None. The NHS and the Government are now facing potential future industrial action from groups seeking similar pay deals. The Government's willingness to take money from pensioners and give it to already well-paid train drivers suggests that such union demands will be successful, further creating a vicious cycle of industrial action that will ultimately be damaging to patients.

I fear that the Labour party sees the Darzi report as a political bludgeon rather than as a blueprint for any meaningful reform. There are undeniable challenges within the NHS—something that I as a doctor see—and we must be honest about them, but instead of a constructive conversation on policy, Labour brings partisan attacks to the table. We now need real leadership, specific reforms, and the courage to make the tough decisions that will keep the NHS suitable for generations to come.

9.54 pm

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): I thank all Members for their contributions to this debate. We should all be grateful to Lord Darzi for his rapid and comprehensive review, although we still do not seem to know at the end of this debate whether the Opposition agree with the diagnosis or not. Essentially, it is evidence of their record, and they do not like it.

This has been a passionate debate with colleagues from all parts of the House addressing how 14 years of failure have damaged their constituencies, let down the people they represent and broken the NHS. Lord Darzi's report is as breathtaking as it is distressing, whether it is discussing the chaos unleashed by Andrew Lansley's top-down reorganisation, the plunge in productivity and patient satisfaction, the disproportionate impact of the pandemic compared with countries across the world or the failure to modernise ways of working. It beggars belief how the previous Government allowed that to happen on their watch. Behind every page of that report, we should remember the real-world suffering caused by the neglect. It is a record of missed opportunities and squandered potential.

Those things are all the more galling for me, as someone who has worked in the NHS and who still cares passionately about its survival. In fact, the reorganisation was so bad that it led me to stand for Parliament. I would not be here today, were it not for Andrew Lansley. The House can make of that what they will. When I worked for the NHS under the previous Labour Government, I saw at first hand the power of politics to improve the system. I saw a health service delivering the shortest waiting times and highest patient satisfaction in history, and since then I have seen it decline in my constituency and the effect that has had on my constituents. When the system lets them down, they have no other options. They cannot afford to go private, they do not have the assets to sell and their families are in the same boat. Health inequalities and inequality of access led me to join the health service, and the Lansley reforms drove me to become an MP. That is why I will not rest until we have completed our health mission to restore the fundamental promise of our NHS: that it will be there for all our constituents when they need it. The charge sheet is too long for me to make too many comments on it.

In the short time I have, I will address the maiden speeches in particular. I worked with my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough) in opposition. I was so delighted to hear that he had won the day after the election. He talked about the global reach of South Norfolk and in particular productivity at the University of East Anglia, which I went to as a student 40 years ago this week, astonishingly. It makes a huge contribution to the economy of South Norfolk, and I know that he will be a good champion. I wish him good luck on SEND and justice. South Norfolk is lucky to have him.

The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding) gave a lovely history of her constituency. She moved us all with the tragic story of the death of her constituents' 19-year-son. She has kept her promise to that mother already in her place today.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy) is a worthy successor to his predecessor. He rightly highlights poverty, particularly in rural areas, and he spoke so eloquently about his father, his care and sadly his death. That is an experience that many people will recognise from covid and will be moved by. I am pleased he is using that experience in this place. His dad and Councillor Thelma would be very proud of him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Alex McIntyre)—I am delighted to have another new Labour Member in the south-west—did a great campaign while having a young family. His passion and pride for Gloucester shone through, whether that is the Romans' military innovation or that Viennetta comes from Gloucester, which I did not know—shame on me. He wants to achieve for all the people in the rich diversity of Gloucester.

The hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom) is the first and longest-serving Member for his constituency, and long may that last. I look forward to his explaining black holes to us all.

It is not a thing, but the hon. Member for Mid Dunbartonshire (Susan Murray) certainly wins the award for suited people coming to represent their constituents. She spoke movingly about her predecessor and the cost of caring for her partner.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) spoke movingly about his family's hard work and dedication that led him to this place. Cromwell and Jane Austen would be very proud of his editing capabilities.

There is an old Irish joke about somebody travelling down from the city to a wedding in the countryside. He cannot remember how to get there so asks a farmer for directions. The farmer says, "I wouldn't start from here." None of us wants to start from here, but this is where the last Government left us, with a broken NHS, a social care system on its knees and an economy failing its people. That is why early next year the Government will publish a 10-year plan setting out how we will deliver the three big shifts that will make the NHS fit for the future.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the choice before us today is to reform or die. There are no quick fixes. But as Lord Darzi reminded us, the NHS's "vital signs are strong". We can tap into the immense reservoir of dedication and talent in our universities, life sciences sector and, above all, the NHS. Getting the NHS back on its feet will be a team effort. Working with patients and the public, alongside 1.5 million NHS staff, we will rebuild our public services, fix the foundations of our economy—

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No.9(3)).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. We did manage to get in 16 speakers even though we had a short amount of time due to Front-Bench contributions.

Hamas Attacks: First Anniversary

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Gen Kitchen.)

10.1 pm

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing this important Adjournment debate. Today is the anniversary of Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel. It was a pogrom in which at least 1,195 Israelis and 79 foreign nationals from some 30 countries were murdered, over 4,800 people were injured and more than 250 men, women and children were taken hostage. It was the worst terrorist attack in Israel's history and the bloodiest day in the history of the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

Dan Tomlinson (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way so early in his speech. It is worth pausing to reflect on the fact that the atrocity was so bad and so many people lost their lives at the hands of Hamas because Hamas intended for that to be the case. In the year that has followed, so many innocent people have lost their lives, suffered and been displaced. Will he join me in condemning Hamas and its evil actions, which took place on 7 October?

Jon Pearce: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention and completely agree that Hamas is a terrorist organisation that set out that day to murder as many innocent civilians as it possibly could. Talk of statistics risks robbing the victims of their humanity and precious individuality. I want to touch on some of the incredible stories from that day.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On that point, will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jon Pearce: I will give way.

Jim Shannon: I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward the debate; I spoke to him beforehand. I bring to his and the House's attention a lady I met when I was in Israel the week after Easter: Amanda Damari, who spoke yesterday about her daughter Emily, who was kidnapped. She has lived that kidnapping every day. Does he agree that we salute the bravery, the courage and the determination of those families to have those hostages—their friends and family members—home to enjoy life once again?

Jon Pearce: I agree with the hon. Member that the courage of the families of the hostages is remarkable. So many in the House will have spoken to those families. Their strength and resolve is extraordinary and empowers all the rest of us.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for being so generous with his time in this really important Adjournment debate. I, too, had the opportunity to meet Mandy Damari, who wanted our Government to acknowledge that her daughter Emily is a British citizen and requires the support of her Government to do everything they can to allow for her release as a hostage.

Jon Pearce: I very much thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I, too, have spoken to Mandy, and she was clear that her daughter is a British citizen. There are four other individuals being held hostage who are connected to Britain, and they also need to come home as soon as possible.

I want to touch on some of the other groups from that day: the group of pensioners on a day trip in the Dead sea who were gunned down in Sderot after their minivan developed a flat tyre; the young partygoers massacred at the Supernova music festival, some of whom, like many women elsewhere that day, were subjected to "unspeakable violence perpetrated with shocking brutality",

according to the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and the 12-year-old British-Israeli twins Yanni and Liel, who were murdered alongside their great aunt and their grandfather at Kibbutz Be'eri. So little of Liel's body was recovered that some of her toys were buried instead. Liel and Yanni were two of the 15 Britons murdered on 7 October.

Mike Reader (Northampton South) (Lab): I will never forget the smell of smoke that hung in the air when I visited that kibbutz in March this year. It will stay with me forever, as will the feeling of isolation as I stood at the site of the Nova festival. The silence was broken only by families mourning. I hope my hon. Friend will agree with me that while today we have heard calls for ceasefires and aid, what is most important in this debate is that we continue to call for the hostages to be returned to their families.

Jon Pearce: The clarion call from this Parliament is "Bring them home." Hamas were indiscriminate in their killing and in those that they dragged back to their terror tunnels in Gaza. They range from nine-month-old Kfir Bibas and four-year-old brother Ariel to 85-year-old Shlomo Mansour. Shlomo survived the 1941 Farhud pogrom in Iraq and emigrated to Israel at the age of 13. On 7 October, Shlomo was kidnapped from his home at the small, quiet kibbutz of Kissufim.

Last month I met Shlomo's granddaughter, Noam. I also met Eviatar David's mother, Galia, and brother, Ilay. On 7 October, 23-year-old Eviatar was seized at the Supernova festival. His family and friends hold weekly dance and jam sessions in Tel Aviv's Hostages Square to raise awareness of his continuing plight. I also met Sharone Lifshitz, the daughter of 85-year-old Yocheved and 84-year-old Oded. On 7 October the couple were taken from their home in Kibbutz Nir Oz. Yocheved was freed after two weeks, but Oded remains in captivity. Oded has spent his life campaigning for peace and Palestinian rights.

Luke Akehurst (North Durham) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate on this profoundly sad occasion. I wish to draw attention to a thread that has gone through everything he said, which relates to the nature of the communities on the Gaza border that were attacked. One of the tragic ironies is that this was an attack on communities that were almost all kibbutzim and moshavim. These were idealistic communities founded on a co-operative ethos, the residents of which practised what they preached about co-existence and peace. I visited such communities in peacetime. They are bucolic and idealistic. The people there spoke about sending money across the border to people they knew in Gaza through third countries, in order to support them. They organised transport to hospitals for people from Gaza. They were people straining every sinew to bring about peace and who believed in a two-state solution. I cannot stop thinking about the

horrors that were visited on them that day. I thank my hon. Friend for giving us the opportunity to honour the memory of the people who suffered on that day.

Jon Pearce: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and could not agree more with his experience of the kibbutz. In July 2023 I visited Kibbutz Kfar Aza, which was founded by the Mizrahi refugees from Morocco and Egypt in 1951. The kibbutz is so close to Gaza that it is possible to hear the mosques' call to prayer. Over lunch with the kibbutzniks, they told us about the ever-present danger of rocket attacks and the terror tunnels that Hamas had attempted to dig nearby. They also spoke of their compassion for the ordinary people of Gaza just a couple of miles away.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Gateshead South) (Lab): I also visited Kfar Aza just a few weeks before the horrific attacks by Hamas on 7 October. The visit had a profound impact on me, especially in the light of what followed just a few short weeks later. I listened to Emily Damari's mum Mandy at the memorial in Hyde park yesterday, pleading with us all who were present to do something to help her daughter. As a mum to an Emily, who is exactly the same age as her Emily will be now, I am here tonight to ask if my hon. Friend will join me in pleading with the Minister and our Government to work night and day to ensure that Emily and the other 100 hostages still being held in unimaginable horror in Gaza are released as soon as humanly possible.

Jon Pearce: I join my hon. Friend's call for the hostages to be returned at the soonest possible opportunity.

The kibbutzniks we spoke to used to stage an annual festival in which they would gather to fly kites adorned with the words "peace", "shalom" and "salam" at the nearby border. Last year, the annual kite festival was set for Saturday 7 October. As always, the Kutz family, whose brainchild the festival was, had prepared the kites, but there were no kites or messages of hope and peace that dark day. Instead, Aviv Kutz, his wife Livnat and his teenager children Rotem, Yonatan and Yiftach were murdered in their home by Hamas terrorists. They were found in a bed, with Aviv's arms around his wife and children. Their unflown kites were found nearby. The family were among more than 60 kibbutz residents who were massacred that day. This has been a horrifying and harrowing year of suffering. As many have said, we must do all we can to bring the fighting to an end as quickly as possible, with the hostages home from Gaza, aid into Gaza and a path to a long-term and sustainable peace.

The impact of that terrible day has been felt 2,000 miles away in what the Prime Minister has rightly described as the rise of vile hatred in our own communities. Antisemitic incidents have reached their highest total. Nearly seven in 10 British Jews report that they are less likely to show visible signs of Judaism. Nearly half say that they have considered leaving the UK because of antisemitism. Jewish children are unable to wear their uniforms on their way to school. Jewish students are intimidated on their campuses. Jewish places of worship are defaced and graffitied. This is intolerable in modern Britain.

I know that a number of Front Benchers would have wished to speak in this debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Sarah Sackman), who have been steadfast in their support throughout the last year. I am sure that the whole House will join me in saying that we stand with and by our Jewish fellow citizens in the face of this hatred. The 7 October atrocities showed humanity at its worst, exposing once again what Holocaust survivor Sam Kaltman termed the thin and fragile "veneer of civilisation". But, as the late Martin Gilbert argued, even on the darkest days there are sparks of light.

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate on the anniversary of the attacks, and for delivering such an eloquent speech. As we mark a year since the appalling attacks, I proudly add my voice to the Bury Faith Forum and the Bury Council of Mosques in emphasising our shared bonds of faith and humanity, and in calling for a sincere, lasting resolution for Israel and Palestine that begins with the safe return of hostages and an immediate ceasefire. Does my hon. Friend agree that even in these darkest of times, the smallest shard of light shines brightest, and that that light is the release of the hostages; a ceasefire; a sustainable, peaceful, secure Israel; and a sustainable, peaceful Palestinian state?

Jon Pearce: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's intervention. I completely agree that following the despair we have seen over the last year, there has to be light at the end of the tunnel. The work done in his constituency to bring together communities across the country will be vital.

I want to end by talking about Emily, who a number of Members have mentioned. I think we have all been touched by the campaign that her mother Mandy continues to run in her name. She says that Emily has never lost touch with her British roots; Emily loves Spurs, Robbie Williams and Cadbury's chocolate buttons, and makes a fine cup of tea. Emily's family have not seen her for 366 days. She was violently kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Her beloved puppy was shot and killed in her arms as Emily was dragged from her home in her pyjamas. Hamas has refused the Red Cross access to Emily and the other hostages, but news of Emily came during last November's hostage release. In the tunnels, those who were released said that Emily had been singing a song to the young girls every morning, called "Boker shel kef"—"It's a great morning".

Emily has not given up hope. Her family has not given up hope, and we must not give up hope. We must bring home the British hostages—Emily, Eli, Oded, Avinatan, Tsachi—and all the hostages. We hold in our hearts all the hostages, all those whose lives were lost on 7 October, those who mourn them, and all those innocent Israelis and Palestinians who have endured pain, sorrow and grief over the past year.

10.16 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): I am hugely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Jon Pearce) for securing this timely debate, and to all hon. Members who intervened and are attending this debate.

[Stephen Doughty]

I give particular recognition to my hon. Friend's work as the recently appointed chair of Labour Friends of Israel. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Hamish Falconer), the Minister with responsibility for the middle east, was of course due to respond to this debate, but he is participating in commemorative events related to this subject, so it is my privilege to respond on behalf of the Government.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak for his candid, at times shocking, and powerful speech, in which he set out the human stories at the heart of the terrible events of 7 October. With him, I pay tribute to the courage and resilience of the families of all those who lost their life, and all those who are still held hostage. A year since the worst terror attack in Israel's history, we remember all those killed at the hands of Hamas in that barbaric attack, their families and their loved ones, and condemn those responsible. Without doubt, it was the bloodiest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust, a day we should never have seen, and would rather we never needed to mark. Distressingly, for some families, the nightmare persists, as their loved ones continue to be held by Hamas. Let me be clear: that is utterly unacceptable. They must be released immediately.

As the Prime Minister said in his statement earlier today, and as has been mentioned by many hon. Members this evening, one of the hostages who still remains in Gaza is Emily Damari. She is, as we have heard, a British citizen who was brutally attacked and kidnapped on the morning of 7 October. A year later, as we have heard, she is still held by Hamas, surrounded by the death and darkness of the tunnels that continue to haunt her loved ones. As we have heard, Emily's story is just one of the painful reminders of the suffering that many families—some British, some British-linked, and many, many more—continue to endure at the hands of Hamas. Their pain is our pain. We continue to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Emily and all the other hostages. My hon. Friend gave many, many other examples. Those chilling examples are proof of Hamas's cruelty. Our thoughts today are with all those who lost loved ones on 7 October and those still cruelly held by Hamas.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to bring to the attention of the House—we have all seen it in our communities—the deeply worrying rise in antisemitism and hatred across the world, including in this country. There is no place for this hatred in our communities and society. Let us be clear: Hamas wanted to not just attack Israel but send a signal to Jews everywhere. It wanted them to feel scared and unsafe, regardless of where in the world they happened to be. The global rise in antisemitism following the attack highlights the need for urgent collective action to eliminate this abhorrent ideology for good. That is why the Government are resolutely committed to working with the Jewish community to address the challenges that it faces in the UK and, indeed, across the world. I have heard from Jewish communities in my city of Cardiff about their fears and their lived experience of antisemitism and hate. I have also met representatives of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Community Security Trust and many other organisations, and I pay tribute to their work.

Today the Foreign Secretary and the Minister with responsibility for the middle east met members of the Jewish community to outline the Government's support for them, and to remember and honour the victims of 7 October. I am proud that this year the UK holds the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance; that allows us to demonstrate our global leadership in combating antisemitism and promoting Holocaust remembrance, research and education.

Tragically, since that dreadful day, we have seen intolerable death and destruction in Gaza. More than 41,000 people have now died, and over half of all identified bodies are those of women and children. We reiterate that no matter how difficult the circumstances, all parties must act in accordance with international law, but the fact that this conflict is continuing and intensifying by the day is a matter of deep concern to Members in all parts of the House. It should compel us to redouble our efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and to pursue the path of politics and diplomacy, because that is the best way to get the hostages out and to stop the devastation for all. We are particularly concerned about the restrictions on humanitarian aid, with winter approaching. Those restrictions must be lifted, so that the UN and humanitarian agencies can do their jobs safely, in accordance with the UN mandate.

Let me turn to what is happening in the wider region. The latest escalation, involving Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian attack on Israel, is yet another blow to regional stability, and we are deeply concerned about the significant number of civilian casualties. The UK was the first G7 country to call for an immediate ceasefire between Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel, on 19 September, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that we stand with Israel and recognise its right to self-defence in the face of Iranian aggression. Iran's malign role in the region is moving the region further towards escalation, and we call on Iran to step back from the brink, because we must avoid this conflict spiralling out of control and into a wider regional war.

Let me say something about how the United Kingdom is responding, which will cover many of the points raised this evening. Let me first reassure all Members that we continue to work with partners across the region to secure the release of all remaining hostages, including British nationals and those with a close connection to the UK. That has been a priority since day one of this Government. The Foreign Secretary has visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories twice, and the Prime Minister has spoken to both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. They have also met the families of those being held by Hamas, and the Prime Minister hosted a commemoration event last week to honour their resilience and undefeated spirit during these challenging times.

The UK will remain a vital security partner to Israel as it faces threats from Iran and its malign partners in the region, who are pursuing its annihilation. We will also play our full diplomatic role in ending this conflict and creating a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. An immediate ceasefire is an absolutely necessary first step towards that goal. In response to the humanitarian crisis, we trebled our aid commitment to the Occupied Palestinian Territories

in the last financial year, and we will maintain significant funding for trusted aid agencies on the ground. We lifted the UK's funding pause on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, following robust action taken to ensure its neutrality, and released £21 million to support UNRWA's humanitarian appeal in Gaza and its provision of basic services.

We need calm heads and an urgent focus on a negotiated political solution to end this cycle of violence, so that Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese civilians can return to their homes and live in peace and security. Together with our allies, the United Kingdom remains determined to steer the region towards a path of peace and reconciliation, and we have a two-state solution at the heart of our approach.

In conclusion, a year on from Hamas's horrific attack on 7 October, the United Kingdom remains firmly committed to Israel's defence and security. Those killed, injured and taken on 7 October and since, and their families, will be in all our minds, especially today. This escalating regional conflict is in no one's interest, which is why we are calling for an immediate ceasefire. Finally, I reiterate that we will continue to use every diplomatic lever to bring that about and secure the release of hostages in co-ordination with our partners. We all want to see them brought home.

Question put and agreed to.

10.25 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 7 October 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

UK-Thailand Enhanced Trade Partnership

The Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander): I am pleased to announce that the UK Thailand enhanced trade partnership was signed and launched on 18 September in Bangkok.

Thailand is south-east Asia's second largest economy. The total trade in goods and services between the UK and Thailand was £5.9 billion to the end of Q1 2024.

The UK-Thailand ETP is a non-legally binding memorandum of understanding, which creates a framework to enhance trade, investment and economic co-operation between the UK and Thailand. The new partnership is designed to boost trade and investment across 20 priority areas including automotive, tourism, investment, digital trade, financial services, and education.

The partnership is underpinned by a comprehensive workplan guided by the priorities identified through consultations with businesses in the UK and Thailand. Its delivery will be overseen by the UK-Thailand Joint Economic and Trade Committee, which will monitor progress and agree updates to the workplan guided by ongoing business consultation.

This partnership further supports this Government's commitment to economic growth through providing a strong commitment and underpinning actions to further enhance our strong bilateral trade relationship with Thailand.

The UK-Thailand enhanced trade partnership text is available online on gov.uk.

[HCWS105]

Late Payments and Long Payment Terms

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): Late payments and long payment terms continue to be a significant issue for small businesses and the self-employed across the UK. In 2022, small businesses were owed on average an estimated £22,000 in late payments from the businesses they supply. As well as the direct costs to businesses through lost and late revenue, there are also indirect costs, which include a reduction in productivity through lost time chasing late payments and forgoing investment and growth opportunities. We are determined to foster a strong payment culture in the UK by bringing the payment performance and behaviour of large companies more clearly into focus.

Therefore, we are announcing that we will lay secondary legislation in this parliamentary Session to make it a requirement for large companies to include information about their payment performance in their annual reports.

This measure will help increase transparency around the payment practices of large businesses and bring them into focus for boards and investors.

Introducing secondary legislation however only represents our first step. The Department for Business and Trade will also launch a public consultation within months on additional legislative measures to address late payments and long payment terms. We will take action as needed to ensure improvements in payment times, especially for small businesses and the self-employed.

We will also be launching a new fair payment code to be overseen by the Small Business Commissioner—a voluntary code of best practice for companies committed to fair and fast payments. This will replace the existing Prompt Payment Code, with a clearer and more measurable set of ambitious commitments and will be a further lever to improve the UK's business payment culture by shining a light on the best performers.

Secondary legislation has also been laid today to amend the Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance Regulations 2017 and the Limited Liability Partnerships (Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance) Regulations 2017, to require qualifying companies and LLPs to publish certain information on their practices, policies and performance with respect to retention clauses in any qualifying construction contracts with suppliers. This measure will help increase transparency around retention policies and performance, and encourage improved payment practices.

This package demonstrates this Government's determination to tackle the scourge of late payments, meeting the commitments laid out in our manifesto and plan for small business.

These initiatives will ensure more businesses are paid on time—ultimately increasing productivity, improving cash flow and driving growth.

[HCWS106]

Post Office Capture Software: Kroll Associates Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Gareth Thomas): Earlier this year, concerns were raised by parliamentarians and postmasters about the Post Office's Capture software, which was rolled out by the Post Office to some branches in the 1990s, and pre-dated Horizon. The concerns were that Capture software had bugs which may have caused shortfalls, leaving postmasters to pay the Post Office back, with some postmasters said to have been prosecuted as a consequence.

Responding to those concerns, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade committed on 9 September to publishing the results of forensic accountant Kroll Associates' investigation into the Capture system as soon as we received its report. Kroll has now completed its investigation, and I published their report on Monday 30 September. The report is available on www.gov.uk and I have also placed a copy in the House Library.

Kroll Associates investigated the Capture software system, examined the available evidence from postmasters and others who have been working with postmasters to uncover the issues with the software. Further evidence from the Post Office was given to Kroll towards the end of their investigation. Considering this, Kroll has produced an addendum to this report which will be published shortly.

I am very grateful to the postmasters and postmasters' families who spoke to and provided evidence to Kroll during the investigation. I recognise in some cases that this meant revisiting very distressing memories. I am grateful to those who attended the ministerial-chaired roundtable hosted by the Department for Business and Trade. I would also like to thank the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board for its continued work on redress issues, in particular Lord Beamish for helping to shine a light on the issues related to Capture.

In the report Kroll concluded there was a reasonable likelihood that Capture could have created shortfalls for sub-postmasters. Kroll has not identified any available evidence that Post Office Ltd's audit, investigations or legal teams took into account known issues with Capture arising from bugs identified in various versions of the software in the course of their work.

I recognise that this report and its conclusions will be of considerable interest to postmasters and their families across the country. The Government will thoroughly examine Kroll's report into the Capture system and its impact on postmasters. We will update the House on next steps in December.

[HCWS100]

DEFENCE

Royal Navy: Behaviours

The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns): This Government are committed to improving service life for our dedicated service personnel. This includes addressing any experience in our armed forces which falls short of the standards we expect. The Secretary of State for Defence made clear in his first address to the Ministry of Defence that we will have a culture that values all, and we will have zero tolerance for any abuse, in the military or the civil service.

That is why today, I am updating the House on the findings of an investigation into misconduct in the submarine service. This investigation was commissioned by the Royal Navy in October 2022 as a result of allegations of misconduct made by a former female submariner. The investigation has now concluded and has found evidence to prove that misogyny, bullying and unacceptable behaviour did occur amongst a range of ranks and rates during the period 2014-2020.

This is appalling and should have never happened. I sincerely apologise for the treatment that the victim experienced during her time as a submariner, and I commend to the House her bravery in coming forward. Those that have chosen to serve deserve better. The First Sea Lord has also offered his personal and unreserved apologies to the victim for her treatment.

Action is under way to address the findings of the investigation. First and foremost, I can confirm that the Royal Navy has conducted misconduct proceedings, and action has been taken against several individuals up to and including discharge from the service.

The investigation also made 37 recommendations to address practical and cultural shortcomings which must change. The First Sea Lord has accepted these in full and implementation is under way. These changes include proactive welfare checks for submarine crews pre and

post deployment, to understand the experiences of the crew; changes to training and the submarine command course; and increased outreach from the Royal Navy Police so that personnel are aware of the routes available to them should they wish to raise a complaint.

Further detail on the investigation, including its findings, recommendations and how they have been implemented has been published on the Ministry of Defence website. The executive summary and redacted report will be placed in the Library of the House. However, changes made so far are not limited to the submarine service. In parallel to the investigation itself, the First Sea Lord instigated a wider review of the Royal Navy's working culture. As a result of this, the Royal Navy has appointed a commodore as its head of culture and a team to support driving cultural, behavioural and leadership improvements across the entirety of the Royal Navy.

Misconduct such as that identified in this investigation is unacceptable and has no place anywhere in Defence. While progress is being made, there is more to be done. I will hold the First Sea Lord, the Royal Navy and the submarine service to account for delivering the change this investigation has identified. I have requested a formal review of progress in six months.

More widely, the MOD has established a programme for raising our standards that builds on existing work to instil a positive working culture and uphold the standards of behaviour that we expect. The programme focuses on communications and training, underpinned by work to test the action being taken and make sure that unacceptable behaviours are being eliminated from Defence.

Work is under way by the new ministerial team to look at what action has been taken to raise standards and tackle unacceptable behaviour so far across the Ministry of Defence and the whole of the military; assess what impact this action has had; identify where we are still falling short; and ensure where we learn lessons and establish good practice this is shared across the whole of Defence.

Furthermore, I will personally oversee the programme of change through our external challenge panel: a group of experienced subject matter experts in organisational change that have been brought together to hold this Department to account for action on these issues, and ensure we have strong ambition and independent testing of our programme.

It is only by delivering on this commitment that we will enable Defence to better reflect the nation it serves and protects, and draw from the best of British talent, to deliver operational outcomes in an increasingly uncertain world.

Poor practices and behaviours in the past that may have been normalised in some quarters are unacceptable, and they have no place today. We will learn from this, and I will provide further updates to the House on action taken across Defence in due course.

The leadership of the submarine service has my, and the First Sea Lord's, full support to deliver the changes needed.

The attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2024-10-07/HCWS103/>.

[HCWS103]

Semiconductor Facility: Newton Aycliffe

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): On Friday 27 September, the Ministry of Defence bolstered the UK defence supply chain with the acquisition of a key semiconductor factory in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham.

This factory is the only secure facility in the UK with the skills and capability to manufacture gallium arsenide semiconductors. These types of specialist semiconductors are used in a number of military platforms, including fighter jet capabilities. It is therefore crucial for our national security that this facility remains suitable for UK defence needs.

This acquisition will not only safeguard the future of the facility, which is critical to the defence supply chain and major military programmes and exports, but also secures up to 100 skilled jobs in the north-east of England.

Semiconductors are vitally important for the functioning of almost every electronic device we use and are equally as important in military platforms. This Government recognise the strategic importance of semiconductors as a critical technology for the future and a significant enabler of the Government's growth and clean energy missions.

The semiconductor factory in Newton Aycliffe, which has been renamed Oetric Semiconductors UK, has been acquired by the Government from its previous parent company Coherent Corporation who were looking to sell or close the site.

I visited the facility on the first day of ownership accompanied by the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor (Alan Strickland). The site and the people working there are doing incredible things for defence, for which I thank them.

This Government intend to invest in the company over the coming years, ensuring the nation's security while boosting UK defence industrial capacity, expanding export opportunities and supporting our mission to deliver growth. These investments will ensure the facility is capable of producing gallium arsenide semiconductors as well as more powerful semiconductors in the future.

Work has already started to implement best practice governance, providing the appropriate financial oversight to secure the company's future success.

[HCWS102]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath OBE), made the following statement today:

This statement concerns an application for development consent made under the Planning Act 2008 by Ecotricity (Heck Fen) Ltd for the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic electricity generating station situated in Lincolnshire.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it.

The statutory deadline for the decision on the Heckington Fen solar park application was 27 September 2024.

Ecotricity (Heck Fen) Ltd has requested that the Secretary of State extends the statutory deadline to allow time for further negotiations with landowners and to ensure the necessary permissions can be obtained. I have decided to set a new deadline of no later than 24 January 2025 for deciding this application for these reasons.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

[HCWS99]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Flood Response: September 2024

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy):

Just over 1,000 properties flooded in late September after double the monthly average of rain fell across central and southern England. Devastating impacts were felt in communities across Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Buckinghamshire and north-west London in particular. Our deepest sympathies are with those whose homes and businesses have been damaged, whose lives have been upended, and who are now facing months of disruption and upset. The Government reiterate their thanks to the Environment Agency, local responders and many others who worked tirelessly to help communities across the country deal with the impacts.

The condition of flood defences has declined in recent years through a lack of investment. This was compounded when no more funding was made available by the previous Government to repair damage from last winter. Asset condition is now at 92%, its lowest point since 2010, with approximately 60,000 properties at higher risk. The Environment Agency has allocated £36 million this year to do the most urgent repairs from last winter's flood events.

Despite this, over 22,000 properties were protected by existing flood defences. Assets have stood up well. The Environment Agency has not had any reports of asset failures that have resulted in flooding. There may be some unseen damage to defences, which the Environment Agency will inspect and assess once the river levels have subsided. My Department will be carrying out a post-event assessment with resilience partners to identify where lessons can be learned.

Protecting communities from flooding is a key priority for this Government. The Government are determined to turbocharge the delivery and repair of flood defences, improve drainage systems and develop natural flood management schemes. That is why we held the first meeting of the Government's newly established flood resilience taskforce last month. The Government set up the taskforce to improve co-ordination of the national and local flood response and strengthen preparedness ahead of the winter flood season.

We are investing over £1.25 billion this year to scale up national resilience through building new and improving existing flood defences. The Government are reviewing the investment programme to get it back on track after the pace slowed due to the impacts of inflation and delays with the supply chain. Decisions on future spending will be made at the spending review later this month.

The Environment Agency's Flood Action Week is running from 14 to 20 October. The campaign has simple messages and aims to increase awareness of the risk of flooding and what individuals and communities can do to prepare.

Together, the Government's work to improve co-ordination of flood response, strengthen our preparedness and invest in our flood defences will better protect communities from flooding right across the country.

[HCWS104]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

British Indian Ocean Territory

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): On 3 October the United Kingdom and the Republic of Mauritius reached an historic agreement on the exercise of sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory/Chagos archipelago. The agreement secures the strategically important UK-US military base on Diego Garcia.

The base on Diego Garcia is critical to national and international security. It has enabled the UK, the US, and our allies and partners to combat some of the most challenging threats to global peace and security, including those from terrorism, organised crime, and instability.

However, since its creation, the British Indian Ocean Territory and the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia has had a contested existence. It has been challenged through various international courts and tribunals, threatening the long-term, secure operation of the base. In recent years, this threat had risen significantly. A legally binding decision against the UK seemed inevitable. It was only a matter of time before the UK would have had to choose between breaking international law or negotiating from a position of weakness and risking national security. The situation was also impacting our relationship with the US, which did not want the legal uncertainty and strongly encouraged us to strike a deal.

In recognition of this, two years ago, the previous Government began sovereignty negotiations. Despite 11 rounds of negotiations, substantive and difficult issues remained.

This Government inherited unfinished business. We were not prepared to put the security interests of this country or our partners at risk. We therefore prioritised an agreement that fundamentally protected UK national interests, respected the interests of our partners, and upheld the international rule of law. The resulting agreement fulfils these objectives.

It is strongly supported by our partners, including the United States. President Biden issued a statement "applauding" this historic agreement within minutes of its announcement. Secretary Blinken and Defence Secretary Austin have also voiced clear public support. India and

the African Union have also hailed the agreement. The agreement strengthens our arguments when it comes to issues like Ukraine or the South China sea.

Under the terms of the agreement, the United Kingdom will agree that the Republic of Mauritius has sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory, also known as the Chagos archipelago. In return, Mauritius will authorise us to exercise their sovereign rights needed for the long-term, secure and effective operation of the joint military base. The agreement covers an initial period of 99 years, with the UK having the right to extend.

For the first time in over 50 years, the base will be undisputed and legally secure, able to operate to its full strategic capability without risk of challenge. The agreement will mean that the UK and US will continue to operate the base well into the next century.

We have full Mauritian backing for robust security arrangements, including preventing foreign armed forces from accessing or establishing themselves on the outer islands. The base's long-term future is more secure under this agreement than without it.

The agreement also addresses the wrongs of the past. This Government deeply regret the way Chagossians were removed from the islands, and the way they were treated thereafter. Chagossian interests were at the heart of the agreement. For the first time since the establishment of the base, the Republic of Mauritius will be able to implement a programme of resettlement to the islands other than Diego Garcia. The UK and the Republic of Mauritius have also committed to support the welfare of Chagossians. The UK will finance a new trust fund for the Republic of Mauritius to use in support of the Chagossian community and remains committed to supporting Chagossians in the UK.

Recognising that relations with our overseas territories are of great interest to this House, Members can be assured that this is a unique agreement that has absolutely no bearing on wider UK Government policy regarding our other overseas territories. Our sovereignty of the Cyprus sovereign base areas, Gibraltar, the Falklands or any OT is not up for negotiation. Each overseas territory has a very different history and they cannot be compared. The UK remains committed to our overseas territories family.

This agreement will be underpinned by a financial package which will be proportionate to the importance of ensuring international security.

This agreement ushers in a new era in relations between the UK and the Republic of Mauritius, two close partners with deep and enduring ties. We intend to intensify co-operation on a wide range of shared priorities, including security, the environment, and economic growth. This will include co-operation to protect the archipelago's unique environment.

The agreement is subject to the finalisation of a treaty which the Government intend to complete over the coming months. Further details will remain confidential until the final version of the treaty has been signed by both sides. Following signature, the Government intend to bring forward a Bill to make the necessary amendments to current legislation to implement the agreement. Parliament will also have the opportunity to scrutinise the treaty in the usual way under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (CraG). Both processes are required to take place before ratification.

[HCWS109]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Annual Capital Investment for Research Call

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Andrew Gwynne): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health (Baroness Merron) has made the following statement:

Today I am pleased to announce Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) funding of nearly £30 million through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) for capital equipment, technology and modular buildings to support NHS trusts in England to deliver high-quality research to improve the health of the population.

This large-scale investment will support 36 NHS trusts to develop and deliver research which aims to reduce early death from major conditions and improve access to high-quality health and care. The funding will increase NHS capacity to deliver commercial clinical trials which bring innovative medicines to patients earlier and maximise our potential to lead the world in clinical trials. This includes investment in modular buildings to expand the footprint for research in hospitals, many of which are in rural and coastal areas. It is important that everyone, regardless of where they live, can access the latest innovations in the health and care system through research.

Funding is going to NHS trusts the length and breadth of England, from Harrogate to Plymouth. A mobile research unit in Hull will increase participation in trials in East Yorkshire; and modular buildings will expand capacity for clinical research in Bradford, Essex, Exeter and Derby.

Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust is receiving funding for a mobile X-ray unit to increase their capability to carry out trials that are normally only available in large research units. This is a huge step forward for a district general hospital, bringing research closer to the communities which they serve.

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust were successful in their application for funding for equipment which applies red and near infrared light to injuries or lesions to improve wound and soft tissue healing. This will allow children to participate in studies at their regular clinic, reducing travel and reaching underserved communities.

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust and East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust will expand their capacity for commercial trials in conditions such as dementia with a stand-alone pharmacy space and a pharmacy dispensary, respectively, to enable studies in new medicines. The Royal Marsden have received funding for equipment to increase capability and capacity in advanced therapy areas in oncology across commercial and non-commercial portfolios.

This significant funding will support cutting edge research to improve population health and support commercial research delivery in NHS settings for both the benefit of patients but also the economic growth of the country, positioning the UK as an attractive place for innovative companies to invest in research.

While the equipment or technology is primarily for research, when not in use in this way, equipment such as MRI Scanners will be used for clinical care. This will bolster the capacity of the health system to carry out procedures such as diagnostic testing to inform care and reduce the time taken to treatment, maximising the benefit from this investment.

[HCWS107]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Legacy of the Troubles

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn): I wish to provide an update to the House following the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal's judgment in

Dillon and others regarding the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act; and on the appointment of Sir John Evans as the Chair of the Robert Hamill inquiry.

The Government are absolutely committed to implementing mechanisms to address the legacy of the troubles that fully comply with human rights. My previous written ministerial statement, laid on 29 July 2024, confirmed that the Government, as part of their ongoing commitment to repealing and replacing the Legacy Act, had formally abandoned all grounds of appeal against the section 4 Human Rights Act declarations of incompatibility made by the Northern Ireland High Court in relation to the Act. This included the immunity provisions, providing important clarity for families that the immunity scheme and other offending provisions would not take effect. I also confirmed the Government's intention to propose measures to further strengthen the independence and powers of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery.

On 20 September, the Court of Appeal handed down its judgment in Dillon and others. The Court recognised

"the wide powers of ICRIR and the benefit of having investigations placed within one body which is well-resourced",

and further noted that the ICRIR has

"unfettered access to all information, documents and materials as it reasonably requires in connection with a review" (<https://www.bailii.org/nie/cases/NICA/2024/59.html>, Paragraph 210).

The Court concluded that such powers

"cannot be criticised, nor should they be underestimated" (<https://www.bailii.org/nie/cases/NICA/2024/59.html>, Paragraph 210).

However, the Court of Appeal also made further declarations of incompatibility in relation to the Legacy Act to those made by the High Court. One of these was in relation to the current prohibition on civil proceedings—another policy pursued by the previous Government that this Government have already committed to reversing.

The other declarations of incompatibility relate to effective next-of-kin participation where an inquest was previously assigned in order to discharge the state's article 2 procedural obligations, and the role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to public disclosure of information <https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/summary-judgment-re-dillon-and-others-ni-troubles-legacy-and-reconciliation-0>

The Government have already made clear their intention to propose measures that allow legacy inquests previously halted to proceed, should that be the preference of families. Notwithstanding this, the Government take these further declarations of incompatibility very seriously, and it remains my priority to ensure that the ICRIR can provide human rights compliant investigations in all relevant cases.

The Court largely upheld the High Court's findings in relation to article 2 of the Windsor framework, which, as I noted in my statement to the House on 29 July, introduces legal uncertainty about what protections are afforded by article 2, and how legislation applies across the United Kingdom.

This is a complex and wide-ranging judgment with significant implications. The Government are therefore carefully considering their findings to inform a decision on the way forward. I wish to make it clear to the House that any such decision will be without prejudice to the Government's absolute commitment to addressing legacy issues in a way that is fully human rights compliant, and with the fullest possible transparency within the framework that rightly exists to ensure that those who work to keep the citizens of the United Kingdom safe are themselves protected from harm.

As set out in my statement of 29 July, the Government have begun preparations to lay in Parliament a draft remedial order under section 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 to remedy the original declarations of incompatibility made by the High Court, including the immunity provisions. In light of the additional declarations of incompatibility made by the Court of Appeal, I am reviewing this process and will update the House in due course.

This Government take their human rights obligations—and their responsibilities to victims and survivors of the troubles—extremely seriously. As part of the Government's commitment to repealing and replacing the Legacy Act, I continue to undertake consultations with interested parties regarding a practical way forward that can command support across communities in Northern Ireland and beyond. I said previously that this process will involve difficult conversations, and that is proving to be the case in my engagements so far, which have been sometimes challenging but always insightful. I am encouraged by the willingness of those I have met to date to engage constructively. I look forward to further discussions in the period ahead.

Separately, I am pleased to announce the appointment of Sir John Evans as chair of the Robert Hamill inquiry. A chair of the inquiry is required in order for the inquiry report to be formally passed to me for publication. Due to the passage of time since the report was completed in 2011, it was necessary for me to appoint a new chair of the inquiry, as the former chair, Justice Sir Edwin Jowitt, is unfortunately unable to continue in the role. I send him my very best wishes, and thank him for all he did in his time as chair.

Sir John was a panel member when the inquiry was in operation, and worked closely with Sir Edwin on the report. Sir John brings a wealth of experience to the role as a former Chief Constable, and I know he will do everything in his power to ensure the inquiry report is published soon.

I will remain in close contact with Sir John ahead of the inquiry report being passed formally to me in order to arrange for the necessary legal and security checks to be completed. While I will do everything I can to ensure the report is published as soon as possible, due to the passage of time since the report was completed, it is imperative that these checks happen before publication.

I want to pay tribute to Robert Hamill's family for their patience and their dignity as they awaited the conclusion of relevant criminal proceedings. I will make a further statement to Parliament when the report is published.

[HCWS108]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Tackling Global Challenges: R&D Programme

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle): The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is focused on improving people's lives by maximising the potential of research and development, science and technology to drive economic growth and wider societal benefits. It is our ambition to accelerate innovation, investment and productivity through world-class science, research and development. In line with this goal, the UK's association to Horizon Europe, the world's largest internationally collaborative research programme, empowers UK innovators and scientists to collaborate with colleagues from across the EU, as well as with other associated countries.

From 2028, the 10th Research and Innovation Framework Programme will replace Horizon Europe. It will be tasked with harnessing excellence-based research and development to support delivery of European security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness.

On 26 September, DSIT published a position paper setting out the UK Government's views on the potential shape and direction of FP10. We have published this position paper to support the work of the EU and member states in developing an impactful programme that delivers research and development across all disciplines of the highest quality to the benefit of all participants. A copy of the position paper was deposited in the Libraries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The Government want to strengthen ties with our European neighbours and explore areas where we can boost our shared prosperity and security through mutually beneficial agreements. This includes ensuring that UK scientists, innovators, businesses, and institutions can collaborate with partners across Europe and beyond.

Given current geopolitical realities, we believe now is the time to address global challenges through collective action. We believe that through genuine openness, EU member states, the UK, and other like-minded countries can pool resources to effectively tackle priorities that affect us all. This includes using the power of research to harness emerging technologies, and in turn boost productivity and competitiveness. Our clear position is for FP10 to be based on openness and excellence, and to ensure the continuation of proven instruments within Horizon Europe.

In the paper, we advocate for an FP10 which:

- Maintains excellence at the very core of FP10 to harness the full potential of Europe's research and innovation capabilities across the entire research pipeline.

- Enables the equal participation of like-minded associated countries in all areas of the programme from its very inception, with barriers removed to ensure collaboration on critical technologies between like-minded partners. Maintaining the principle of openness to those who share common goals and values will support the best research and collaboration to tackle these shared challenges.

- Preserves the three-pillar architecture in Horizon Europe, maintaining stable and predictable support for proven elements within Horizon Europe to continue supporting discovery research, international collaboration opportunities and applied innovation. Through a careful balance between curiosity-driven research and applied research and innovation, FP10 should remain flexible and responsive to future global challenges.

We very much welcome opportunities for future discussion with researchers, innovators, businesses, institutions, the European Commission and EU member states as FP10 develops, given our many shared priorities.

We will, of course, be interested in potentially associating to FP10, assuming it is open, relevant, and provides good value for researchers and taxpayers.

[HCWS101]

TRANSPORT

Planning

The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):

This statement confirms that it is necessary to extend the deadline for a decision on the application by National Highways under the Planning Act 2008 for the A122 (Lower Thames crossing) development consent order.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, a decision on an application must be made within three months of receipt of the examining authority's report, unless the power under section 107(3) is exercised to extend the deadline, and a written ministerial statement is made to Parliament announcing the new deadline.

The examining authority's report on the Lower Thames crossing development consent order was received on 20 March 2024. The current deadline for a decision is 4 October 2024, having been extended from 20 June 2024 by way of a written ministerial statement dated 24 May 2024.

The deadline for the decision is to be further extended to 23 May 2025 in order to allow more time for the application to be considered further, including any decisions made as part of the spending review.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant the application development consent.

[HCWS110]

Petitions

Monday 7 October 2024

OBSERVATIONS

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Protection of the Amazon rainforest

The petition of the residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Amazon is the world's largest rainforest and makes up half of the planet's remaining tropical forests, home to about three million species of plants and animals and 1.6 million indigenous people; further notes that the forest is the world's largest natural carbon sinks, absorbing and storing an amount of carbon equivalent to 15 to 20 years of global CO₂ emissions from the atmosphere; and further declares continued deforestation of the Amazon is contributing to the forest's inability to recover from droughts, fires and landslides.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Brazilian Government to protect forest land and end large-scale deforestation, to prevent nearly half of the Amazon rainforest from collapsing and that these irreversible consequences for the Amazon and the planet are avoided.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Martyn Day, Official Report, 30 April 2024; Vol. 749, c. 230.*]

[P002964]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy):

The Government believe we need urgent action to protect and restore forests globally. Forests are essential for the lives and livelihoods of over 1 billion people worldwide, including many indigenous peoples and local communities. Globally, forests harbour 80% of our terrestrial biodiversity and, when sustainably managed, can deliver a significant portion of what is needed to keep global heating within a 1.5° pathway, as agreed under the Paris agreement.

The Amazon rainforest plays an unparalleled role in regulating climate locally, regionally and globally, and provides numerous other benefits for biodiversity, and for the lives, livelihoods, health and wellbeing of people across the region and worldwide.

Brazil and Colombia have made important progress in reducing deforestation in recent years, but there is much more to do globally. Commodity-driven deforestation and continued rates of forest loss in the wider Amazon biome pose risks of crossing key “tipping points”, with significant impacts for people, nature, and climate at local and planetary scales.

The UK has played a central role in efforts to improve the stewardship of global forest landscapes, including by helping galvanise partners behind a commitment to halt and reverse forest loss and forest degradation by 2030. Lasting impacts can only be achieved if we work in partnership with forest countries to find solutions that support their needs and those of local communities. As we approach United Nations framework convention on climate change COP30, we are engaging closely with and encouraging partners, including Brazil, to step up

our collective efforts towards delivery of the 2030 goal, including by addressing the significant drivers of large-scale deforestation and forest degradation.

Through our international climate finance programming, we are helping partners across some of the world's most critical forest biomes to deliver locally led visions of sustainable forest stewardship that works for people, while delivering for climate and wider environmental goals.

In August, UK and Brazil Ministers issued a joint statement on international climate co-operation. This reaffirms our shared commitment to deepening collaboration to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030 in the context of sustainable development, as agreed through the first global stocktake at COP28—an assessment of progress made against global warming since the Paris agreement in 2015.

TRANSPORT

Portishead railway branch line

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that reopening the Portishead branch line is necessary to reduce traffic on the congested roads between Portishead and Bristol; further that reducing such traffic would lead to lower CO₂ emissions, thus benefitting the environment and further that this branch line is needed to encourage investment and economic growth in Portishead and the greater Bristol area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to recognise the considerable work already performed to reopen the Portishead branch line, to recognise public funding already invested in it, and to consider the resource needs of the Portishead branch line when providing funding for transport in this area—[*Presented by Sadik Al-Hassan, Official Report, 11 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 6P.*]

[P003009]

Observations from the Minister for Rail (Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE):

I am aware that the reopening of the branch line to Portishead is a long-standing aspiration of local stakeholders and residents, and recognise the benefits that the project could bring to the local community, as well as the wider environmental and economic benefits the petition has outlined. I also recognise and appreciate the work and funding already invested in the project, noting that this includes £13.8 million of Government funding towards the development of a business case and detailed design.

The Chancellor has been clear about the state of the nation's finances, and the Secretary of State for Transport announced in July that she has commissioned an internal review of the Department's capital portfolio. This will support the development of a long-term strategy for transport that delivers a modern and integrated network with people at its heart.

The Government want to ensure that rail investment meets the needs of rail users and communities alike. Individual schemes will be assessed on their alignment with Government priorities, the strength of their business case, and their affordability.

Proposals for the A21 level crossing at Robertsbridge

The petition of businesses of Hastings and the wider area of East Sussex south of Robertsbridge,

Declares that suppliers of businesses based south of Robertsbridge utilise the A21 as the main road in and out of Hastings and its environs to deliver raw materials and goods, and in turn businesses use the A21 to deliver our products across the UK and overseas; and further that the building of a level steam crossing on the A21 will have a severe impact on the timeliness and efficiency of the transport of goods in and out of the Hastings area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to request that the planning permission be withdrawn.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Helena Dollimore, *Official Report*, 11 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 5P.]

[P003008]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):

Transport and Works Act orders are granted by the Secretary of State under the Transport and Works Act 1992 and they are the usual way of authorising guided transport schemes including amendments to heritage railways in England and Wales. In the case of the level crossing on the A21, a TWAO application was made by Rother Valley Railway to the Department for Transport for a TWAO in April 2018 to reinstate a section of heritage railway track between Udiam and Robertsbridge which would complete the rail link between Bodiam and Robertsbridge Junction and link the existing sections of track to the main line. This included the introduction of a number of level crossings across the public highway including the A21 at Robertsbridge. An opportunity was provided for anyone to make comments on this application and following receipt of objections the then Secretary of State held a public inquiry into this application in July 2021.

The public inquiry was chaired by an independent planning inspector organised by the Planning Inspectorate and interested parties were given a chance to present their cases to the inspector. Once the inquiry concluded, the inspector provided a recommendation to the Secretary of State on whether to approve the application and proposed modifications on 19 January 2023. Informed by this, a decision was made to approve the TWAO by the Secretary of State on 19 April 2023. A copy of the

decision letter and inspector's report, which included consideration of the level crossing on the A21 can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bodiam-to-robertsbridge-junction-order-transport-and-works-act-order>.

The introduction of a level crossing across the A21 was given extensive consideration during the public inquiry. The inspector considered the proposals put forward for a level crossing over this road and its compliance with the design manual for roads and bridges. This sets out standards, advice notes and other documents relating to the design, assessment and operation of trunk roads, including motorways in the United Kingdom. Specifically, the proposed level crossing falls into a category that required a “departure from standards” application, which was considered independently by National Highways’ safety, engineering and standards division.

As set out at paragraphs 22 to 24 of the decision letter, National Highways, following an extensive review of the “departure from standards” submission made by RVR, formally approved the departure from standards on 2 August 2022. The Secretary of State at the time noted that National Highways’ initial objection to the order scheme dated 31 May 2018 was withdrawn on 4 August 2022 and that it was satisfied that the queues and delays likely to be associated with the operation of the A21 level crossing are unlikely to adversely affect the free flow of traffic on the A21. The inspector concluded that the effect of the proposed level crossing on the free flow of traffic and congestion on the A21 would be acceptable and would not weigh materially against the order scheme which was agreed.

An application under the TWA can be made to the Secretary of State seeking the revocation of an existing TWAO, and the usual rules and procedures applying to an application for a TWAO would apply. Alternatively, a TWAO can be revoked or amended using powers under section 7 of the TWA, for reasons relating to delivery of defence infrastructure, safety or where the order appears to be spent. As the need to revoke the order does not relate to defence infrastructure and it could not be described as spent, our sole power would be if it appears necessary or expedient in the interest of safety, or in consequence of the abandonment or neglect of any works. There is no suggestion of abandonment or neglect of any works. On the issue of safety at level crossings, this was considered extensively through the public inquiry and by the then Secretary of State and is addressed in the decision letter. There is no suggestion that the safety position considered then has changed.

Written Corrections

Monday 7 October 2024

Ministerial Corrections

EDUCATION

The following extracts are from Education questions on 9 September 2024.

Level 3 Vocational Pathways

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson): Qualifications must deliver on our missions, enhancing and spreading opportunity, and growing our economy. The last Conservative Government botched the roll-out of T-levels and defunded them. That is why this Labour Government have announced a pause and review of qualifications reforms, to support skills growth and students, and to bring certainty where there has been chaos.

[*Official Report*, 9 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 547.]

Written correction submitted by the Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson):

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson): Qualifications must deliver on our missions, enhancing and spreading opportunity, and growing our economy. The last Conservative Government botched the roll-out of T-levels and **wider qualifications defunding**. That is why this Labour Government have announced a pause and review of qualifications reforms, to support skills growth and students, and to bring certainty where there has been chaos.

SEND Provision

Bridget Phillipson: It is certainly the case that there is a big workforce challenge, and making sure that we have specialists in critical areas is a central part of making sure children and young people can access the support they need. Our school support staff will play a crucial role in that, which is why Labour will reinstate the school support staff negotiating body. We will make

sure that teachers have more training alongside support staff, in order to deliver better support and education for our young people, and this year we are investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists. [*Official Report*, 9 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 556.]

Written correction submitted by the Secretary of State for Education:

Bridget Phillipson: It is certainly the case that there is a big workforce challenge, and making sure that we have specialists in critical areas is a central part of making sure children and young people can access the support they need. Our school support staff will play a crucial role in that, which is why Labour will reinstate the school support staff negotiating body. We will make sure that teachers have more training alongside support staff, in order to deliver better support and education for our young people, and **from** this year we are investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Safety and Resilience

The following extract is from the debate on Building Safety and Resilience on 11 September 2024.

Alex Norris: Colleagues have talked about buying, selling or remortgaging homes. We have seen improvements in that space, but we remain vigilant. We will continue to hold particularly the 10 largest lenders to account following their commitment to lend on properties even where remediation is not yet complete. They must keep that promise.

[*Official Report*, 11 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 928.]

Written correction submitted by the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris):

Alex Norris: Colleagues have talked about buying, selling or remortgaging homes. We have seen improvements in that space, but we remain vigilant. We will continue to hold particularly the 10 **major** lenders to account following their commitment to lend on properties even where remediation is not yet complete. They must keep that promise.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 7 October 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
WORK AND PENSIONS	2	WORK AND PENSIONS—continued	
Access to Work Programme.....	5	Jobcentre Plus.....	11
Benefit Sanctions.....	16	Pension Credit	8
Carer's Allowance Overpayments	15	Topical Questions	16
Child Maintenance Service.....	6	Vulnerable People: Support into Work	9
Child Poverty	14	Winter Fuel Payment.....	2
Child Poverty Taskforce.....	13	Winter Fuel Payment: Medical Conditions	7
Jobcentre Access: Rural Areas.....	11	Women's State Pension Age: Compensation.....	8
Jobcentre Claimants: Travel Costs.....	13		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 7 October 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS AND TRADE	1WS	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	7WS
Late Payments and Long Payment Terms	1WS	British Indian Ocean Territory	7WS
Post Office Capture Software: Kroll Associates Report.....	2WS	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	9WS
UK-Thailand Enhanced Trade Partnership.....	1WS	Annual Capital Investment for Research Call	9WS
DEFENCE	3WS	NORTHERN IRELAND	9WS
Royal Navy: Behaviours.....	3WS	Legacy of the Troubles	9WS
Semiconductor Facility: Newton Aycliffe	5WS	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ..	12WS
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	5WS	Tackling Global Challenges: R&D Programme.....	12WS
Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects.....	5WS	TRANSPORT	13WS
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	6WS	Planning.....	13WS
Flood Response: September 2024.....	6WS		

PETITIONS

Monday 7 October 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	1P	TRANSPORT—continued	
Protection of the Amazon rainforest.....	1P	Proposals for the A21level crossing at Robertsbridge	3P
TRANSPORT	2P		
Portishead railway branch line.....	2P		

WRITTEN CORRECTIONS

Monday 7 October 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS	1WC	MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS—continued	
Education	1WC	Housing, Communities and LocalGovernment	2WC
Level 3 Vocational Pathways	1WC	Building Safety and Resilience.....	2WC
SEND Provision	1WC		

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CONTENTS

Monday 7 October 2024

List of Government and Principal Officers of the House

Speaker's Statement [Col. 1]

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

Anniversary of 7 October Attacks: Middle East [Col. 23]
Statement—(Prime Minister)

British Indian Ocean Territory: Negotiations [Col. 45]
Statement—(Mr David Lammy)

Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage [Col. 65]
Statement—(Ed Miliband)

NHS Performance: Darzi Investigation [Col. 82]
General debate

Hamas Attacks: First Anniversary [Col. 131]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

Petitions [Col. 1P]
Observations

Written Corrections [Col. 1WC]
Observations
