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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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House of Lords

Thursday, 27 January 2011.

10.45 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Hereford.

Introduction: Lord Magan of Castletown

10.55 am

George Morgan Magan, Esquire, having been created Baron Magan of Castletown, of Kensington in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Lord Northbrook and Lord Howard of Rising, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Introduction: Lord Grade of Yarmouth

11 am

Michael Ian Grade, Esquire, CBE, having been created Baron Grade of Yarmouth, of Yarmouth in the County of Isle of Wight, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Baroness Sharples and Baroness Buscombe, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Introduction: Baroness Jenkin of Kennington

11.05 am

Anne Caroline Jenkin, having been created Baroness Jenkin of Kennington, of Hatfield Peverel in the County of Essex, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Lord Jenkin of Roding and Baroness Shephard of Northwold, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Defra: Disease Outbreaks Question

11.11 am

Asked By *The Countess of Mar*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what contingency funding the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has for disease outbreaks.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): My Lords, no specific funding is set aside for disease outbreaks. However, we do a great deal of work preparing for disease outbreaks to prevent incursions and to minimise impact in the event of an outbreak.

The Countess of Mar: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he appreciate that this is the 10th year since the foot and mouth epidemic in 2001 and that Exercise Silver Birch seemed to demonstrate that we have not progressed much further with, for example, the validation of field gate tests and the acceptance of vaccination by abattoirs? The excuse given by the trade is, apparently, that the public do not like vaccination, but the public eat vaccinated meat all the time. What is being done to improve the validation of field-side tests, blood tests that distinguish between vaccinated and non-vaccinated animals and farm gate tests?

Lord Henley: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Countess for reminding us that it is only 10 years since the last major outbreak of foot and mouth, which she, I and many others remember well. I am also grateful to her for mentioning Exercise Silver Birch, which has recently concluded. It was a fairly major exercise organised by Defra, the devolved Administrations and many others, in which more than 600 people took part to look at how a foot and mouth outbreak might affect England, Scotland and Wales. The important thing to remember about it is that it will report in due course. I hope that lessons can be learnt from the report when it is published in, we hope, March of this year. That will probably be when I can comment in more detail on the further points that the noble Countess made, which are very valid at this stage.

Lord Plumb: Does the Minister agree that contingency planning and funding are becoming more important, as exotic diseases will probably come into this country through greater globalisation and climate change? Does he accept that, in the ongoing situation, there should be more contingency planning to deal with outbreaks of TB? We are still losing something like 100 cattle a day through tuberculosis. I accept that much is being done, but is Defra satisfied with the efficacy of the vaccine for badgers?

Lord Henley: My Lords, my noble friend is right to point to the importance of contingency planning, rather than contingency funding. The important thing is that we plan for these situations. I can give an assurance that Defra has planned and will continue to plan and test for all diseases. I also underline his point about the increasing risk of exotic diseases, which is one possible consequence of climate change. As regards his specific question about the efficacy of the badger vaccine, I can give an assurance that laboratory studies have demonstrated that the vaccination of badgers by injection with BCG significantly reduces the progression, severity and excretion of TB infection after experimental challenge. However, we still have a little way to go on these matters before we can make such vaccines more widely available.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch: My Lords, is it not true that our reaction to the last foot and mouth outbreak was almost entirely dictated by Brussels? If the common agricultural policy still controls such matters, how can we make independent plans for any contingency funding?

Lord Henley: My Lords, I am talking about contingency planning, rather than contingency funding. However, I give an assurance that Defra will continue to make the appropriate plans in these matters, on which we are not totally dictated to by the European Union, despite what the noble Lord says.

The Lord Bishop of Hereford: My Lords, I am pleased to hear the Minister speak about contingency planning, but clearly different diseases need different kinds of plans. I would like some assurance that the different plans for the different diseases will be sufficiently straightforward and easily implemented if they should be needed. Secondly, will there be sufficient funding to maintain UK-based food production, which is so vital, should there unfortunately be a disease outbreak disaster again in the future?

Lord Henley: I thank the right reverend Prelate for his question. I remind him that planning is the most important thing, rather than funding. If funding is a problem, that would be an occasion, as I think all noble Lords know, when it might be appropriate to go to the Treasury to ask for more funds. I will not comment on that in advance. As regards his question about the possibility of food shortages, I do not think that that is a problem at this stage but, again, it is something that Defra will take into account.

Lord Soulsby of Swaffham Prior: My Lords, what arrangements have the Government made to recruit veterinary surgeons from private veterinary practice to undertake inspection and control work in the event of a major disease outbreak in this country? Would the Government offer contracts to those people who are willing to undertake such work?

Lord Henley: My Lords, I cannot give a specific answer on the last point made by my noble friend, but I can assure him that we will use private vets where necessary in the event of a major outbreak.

Lord Grantchester: To build on the question asked by the noble Lord, Lord Soulsby, I should like to continue with the issue of the everyday challenge of TB in cattle. I declare my interest, having sold my dairy herd last year. From the recent business review within the noble Lord's department, the decision was taken to bring veterinary services back in house, rather than contract out to local vets. The lack of commercial flexibility in these new arrangements and a lack of local knowledge of farming clients have disrupted the concerted and co-ordinated efforts to minimise disease risk and to avoid disruption to trade from pre-movement testing and the six-day rule, to say nothing of the everyday challenges and redundancies brought to independent veterinary practices. Will the Minister ask his department to assess whether this policy is working effectively for disease control and livelihoods in the countryside?

Lord Henley: My Lords, the noble Lord will be aware that our consultation on bovine TB concluded recently. We will make an announcement shortly.

Zimbabwe Question

11.19 am

Asked By Lord St John of Bletso

To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures they are taking to assist the Government of Zimbabwe to expedite the processes enabling free and fair elections under the new constitution.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): My Lords, the United Kingdom has contributed to UN funding of the constitutional review process, with a referendum due to be held in the summer of this year. We are also working with international partners, particularly the Southern African Development Community, on a process to seek to ensure that elections, when held, will not see a repeat of the violence of 2008. The prospects for credible elections will be greater if sufficient time is allowed for important reforms to be implemented.

Lord St John of Bletso: My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that, while there have been considerable advances in the revival of the economy in Zimbabwe, it is vital that there is, for the future sustainability of the country, a clearer political road map? In this regard, while I appreciate that there should be African solutions for African problems, does the Minister not agree that it is highly unlikely that there will be free and fair elections in the country until such time as the new constitution is agreed by referendum by the peoples of Zimbabwe, with a complete overhaul of the rigged voters' roll and, finally, a cessation of the ongoing intimidation tactics of the hard-line ZANU-PF supporters?

Lord Howell of Guildford: Yes, I agree with the noble Lord's assessment. On the economic side, things are looking much better. There was 8 per cent growth last year, with a similar rate of growth or even higher this year, albeit from a very low base. On the political side, however, the progress has not been so good. Mr Mugabe seems to be pressing for early elections, but at the same time there is very clear evidence of intimidation and violence rising again. We strongly believe that, as the noble Lord has said, the constitutional process must be carried right through, with the support of SADC, with the new commissions being formed and a system being created in which elections can take place. Those, more properly, should be later on.

Lord Avebury: My Lords, what action is being taken by the AU, SADC or Mr Jacob Zuma about the growing violence and intimidation? Also, what action is SADC taking against the illegal diamond smuggling by the army into Mozambique, which is being carried out to fund the ZANU-PF campaign of violence?

Lord Howell of Guildford: Mr Jacob Zuma has said, while leading SADC's support programme, that he will take personal responsibility to see that the constitutional process goes forward and that the country is properly prepared for elections. We support him in those aims; that must be the right way forward. As to

the diamond smuggling and the influence of diamond sales on the whole scene, we have continued to push for compliance with the Kimberley process standards, which include the continued supervision of exports. Frankly, our European Union colleagues have not been so helpful lately in upholding the supervision of exports, which is needed to check the kind of smuggling to which my noble friend refers. Obviously, as far as this country is concerned, we have our smuggling controls at our ports, but the overall supervision of smuggling needs to be strengthened. We are continuing to push for that to happen in the Kimberley process.

Lord Hughes of Woodside: My Lords, I accept that the problems of Zimbabwe have to be solved within Africa itself, but is the noble Lord aware of the reports of violence and intimidation growing day by day? While it is right that President Zuma has accepted responsibility, does the Minister agree that there is an important role for the Commonwealth in this? What is he doing to pursue that?

Lord Howell of Guildford: I am indeed aware of the reports that there is, once again, growing violence. That is very disturbing indeed. Like the noble Lord, I am constantly raising the role of the Commonwealth. At the moment, SADC is leading in these matters but there is considerable Commonwealth interest and, if we are able to get some improvement not only on the economic side but on the political side, the Commonwealth could collectively play a much more forward role in the recovery of that great and potentially prosperous but sadly depleted country.

Lord Elystan-Morgan: Can the Minister kindly tell the House what technical assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to the Electoral Commission, the Human Rights Commission and the Media Commission in Zimbabwe?

Lord Howell of Guildford: There is a lot of assistance, although it is not, of course, to the Government of Zimbabwe—no assistance goes to them. However, considerable assistance goes through the UN and the non-governmental organisations. Indeed, our programme of aid for the kind of developments that the noble Lord has described is substantial; I think that it is in the region of £66 million in the past year. While I cannot go into the precise technical details of that now—I will certainly write to him with more information—the overall thrust of our aid is considerable and rightly focused on those kinds of improvements.

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: My Lords, does the noble Lord agree that it is highly unlikely that Zimbabwe or, indeed, President Mugabe will issue an invitation to the European Union to observe any future election and that any such election, if and when it occurs, will be credible only if it involves having that EU observation mission there? Also, is the noble Lord aware that, in the forward planning that the EU has already done for 2011, Zimbabwe appears only as a country to follow?

Lord Howell of Guildford: I most certainly agree with the noble Baroness that there must be proper monitoring by the EU, and perhaps by other organisations as well, when these elections take place. The issue at

present is when that will be. The sensible view, from the point of view of all the reformers and those who want to see Zimbabwe prosper, must of course be that that comes after the constitutional process has been completed. We are all entitled to be worried at the suggestions that Mr Mugabe may try to push for much earlier elections, particularly in the light of all the violence. However, EU monitoring must play a part. The noble Baroness is absolutely correct on that and, when the elections come in sight, that is something that we will certainly be urging.

Airlines: Snow and Ice *Question*

11.26 am

Asked By Lord Dubs

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure that airport authorities will be able to deal adequately with snow and ice in the future.

Earl Attlee: My Lords, the Government have invited the South East Airports Taskforce to consider airports' contingency responses to last December's severe weather. The Government are also considering proposals, under a Bill to reform economic regulation of airports, for new licensing provisions to give the aviation regulator more flexibility, where appropriate, to strengthen airports' resilience to severe weather.

Lord Dubs: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that. Does he agree that what happened at Heathrow last month represented a national humiliation, given that Heathrow was closed for far longer than other airports in other countries that suffered? Is not the problem that the British Airports Authority failed to learn the lessons of last winter and to invest in proper snow-clearing measures, with the result that the airlines, particularly British Airways, were out of pocket many times more than the cost of providing those measures?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, I share the noble Lord's concern. It is important that we look at what happened, avoid a witch-hunt and make sure that BAA takes appropriate steps to avoid a repeat. It is important to remember that it cost BAA was £24 million in lost revenue. It is also important to understand that, because of the situation that arose, there were 24 aircraft stands with an aircraft stuck on them and that it takes a very long time to clear a stand when the aircraft is standing on it.

Lord Lawson of Blaby: My Lords, can my noble friend inform the House of the statistical and scientific evidence for the Met Office's estimate that there was only a one in 20 chance of a severe winter in 2010-11, an estimate on which the airports relied?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, my right honourable friend the Secretary of State has asked Sir John Beddington to give him scientific advice on the likelihood of future

[EARL ATTLEE]

severe winters. On 25 October 2010, the Met Office provided the Cabinet Office with an updated three-monthly forecast, which suggested a 40 per cent chance of cold conditions, a 30 per cent chance of near average conditions and a 30 per cent chance of mild conditions over northern Europe.

Lord McKenzie of Luton: Does the Minister think that BAA and other airports might benefit from the experience of London Luton Airport, which this winter has lost just five hours of operations—that was due to closure of airspace by NATS—despite the fact that Luton experienced greater snowfall than Heathrow? Does he agree that this was down to good management and planning, involving investment in equipment and consumables, early rehearsals of runway closure procedures and co-ordination across the airport, particularly with handling agents?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, the noble Lord makes the important point that good planning can mitigate the effect, but Heathrow Airport experienced 16 centimetres of snow in one hour, which was far more than was reasonable to plan for.

Baroness Butler-Sloss: I am one of those who suffered and waited at Gatwick Airport. Is the Minister aware that Gatwick managed to get all its passengers off at least two or three days ahead of Heathrow, I think, despite the fact that it suffered a great deal more snow? Gatwick set an example in that respect. I gather that it is not owned by BAA.

Earl Attlee: My Lords, most of what the noble and learned Baroness said is entirely correct. I am sure that the south-east airport review will take that matter into consideration.

Lord Mawhinney: My Lords, given that the Government understand the economic and social benefits attached to Heathrow and Gatwick, will they commission an independent investigation into the resources and procedures at those two airports to deal with snow and ice, compare those with what happens at New York and Boston Airports, and then publish the consequent report?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, I am sure that the output from the two reviews will achieve the effect that my noble friend desires.

Lord Davies of Oldham: My Lords, the House will be reassured that the Government are taking some action in this area, because action is certainly needed. We are all aware of the great significance of Heathrow in terms of passenger and freight traffic and its importance to tourism in this country. When the reputation of Heathrow suffers, so does the whole country. Will the Minister take particular interest in the level of communication with passengers when there are difficulties because there is no doubt that people suffered unduly at Heathrow as they had no idea what was going on day after day after day? It is important that the airport addresses this.

Earl Attlee: My Lords, the noble Lord makes an extremely important point. The point is applicable not just to Heathrow but to all transport modes. Noble Lords will remember the problems that we had with the railway industry, which struggled to cope with very difficult conditions but found it difficult to meet passengers' expectations about information.

Baroness O'Loan: My Lords, will the Minister ensure that BAA is required to explain why those whose flights did not depart within four hours were not permitted access to terminal 1 on 22 December but were left outside in subzero temperatures, despite the fact that the terminal was half empty?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, I do not have precise details on that, but I will write to the noble Baroness.

The Earl of Mar and Kellie: My Lords, does my noble friend agree that those airport managers who do not maintain sufficient snow and ice-clearing equipment should be forced to describe their airports as being only seasonal?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, when BAA makes its winter resilience plan, the plan is agreed with the airlines. However, what we experienced at Heathrow was far in excess of what was agreed on in the plan.

Baroness Walmsley: Does the Minister agree that lessons should be learnt from other countries? Is the noble Lord aware—

Noble Lords: Order!

Lord Browne of Ladyton: My Lords, the Minister will recollect that on the previous occasion that he answered questions on this issue in this House he made the very important point that part of the problem at Heathrow Airport, as we all know, is that it has no room for resilience because it operates at 98 per cent of its capacity day in and day out. When the weather changes or dramatic circumstances affect it, the airport has no flexibility. The answer to that lies either in increasing capacity or in reducing usage. Will this issue be addressed when resilience is being considered?

Earl Attlee: My Lords, I am sure that people will consider that, but it is important to remember that Charles de Gaulle Airport has four runways running at 75 per cent capacity but still experienced severe difficulties.

Telephone Hacking

Question

11.35 am

Asked By **Lord Fowler**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to prevent telephone hacking.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, the intentional, unauthorised interception of communications in the course of their transmission is illegal under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. The police are responsible for the investigation of unlawful

interception, including telephone hacking, and the Crown Prosecution Service is responsible for the prosecution of such cases.

Lord Fowler: My Lords, I thank my noble friend for that reply. Does he remember the Watergate scandal, in which one brave newspaper protected the public interest? Has not exactly the opposite happened in the phone hacking scandal, in which one newspaper—and possibly others—has not exposed injustice but instead directly conspired against the public? Does he agree that after any further criminal proceedings there will be a need for a full-scale inquiry to ascertain what happened and how the public can be protected?

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, the House will appreciate that this is a topical question that is almost too topical for me to be able to answer—I am up to date with the “Today” programme but not entirely up to date with what may or may not have happened since. Noble Lords will be aware that the Metropolitan Police announced yesterday that, in light of the fresh information supplied by the *News of the World*, the police will conduct a new investigation into phone hacking allegations. The investigation will be led by the specialist crime directorate, which is a different unit within the Metropolitan Police from that which carried out the original investigation. The investigation will be led by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Sue Akers. In addition, the Director of Public Prosecutions announced earlier this month that a comprehensive assessment of all the material in the possession of the police in relation to phone hacking would be carried out by an independent reviewer, Alison Levitt QC.

Lord Soley: Given that, as the Minister says, telephone hacking is unlawful and always has been, does he accept that there is an underlying problem here within the culture of journalism? This started with fishing expeditions to see whether any interesting stories could be pulled up, but these expeditions are also carried out in other ways, as was the case in the incident concerning Vince Cable MP. Bizarrely, the editor of that newspaper then tried to hush up the story because it was not its policy to draw attention to Rupert Murdoch’s takeover of BSkyB. Will a major effort be made at some stage to get journalism to recognise that it has a cultural problem here, which the PCC is not addressing in the way that it should?

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, I think that we all understand that the press as a whole now faces a crisis of trust that is at least as great as the crisis of trust in politics, which we need to address. We look to the press to act up to its own responsibilities, which it is very clear many of its members have failed to do.

Lord Dholakia: My Lords, will the Minister have a word with the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission on how it has addressed this issue? Will he further inquire how it intends to deal with such matters so that in future people’s privacy is not breached?

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, it is evident that the role of the Press Complaints Commission and the extent to which its code of practice is observed and enforced are questions that we will have to address. While the Government believe that a press free of state intervention is fundamental to our democracy, there is no place for illegal activity.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: My Lords, it has taken the police five years to take this matter seriously. Is the noble Lord aware of the comments today from the former assistant commissioner Brian Paddick, who said that the reason for police inaction was fear of upsetting newspaper editors? Does that not argue for greater media plurality in this country? Why are the Government so reluctant to refer the proposed takeover by News Corporation of BSkyB to the Competition Commission?

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, we are all aware that this raises large questions about the future of the press, the relationship between the press and the police and the role of a plural press in our democracy. We will return to these issues on a number of occasions. We will certainly return to the question of police accountability when we debate the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill.

Lord Prescott: My Lords, now that the Government accept that this was a criminal act, do they also accept the excuse that was given that it was the work of a single rogue operator? That proposal was put forward by the Metropolitan Police, the newspaper editors, the Press Complaints Commission and the Crown Prosecution Service. After a number of inquiries, they still came to that conclusion. That is unacceptable. I ask the honourable, I mean noble, Lord—I knew that I would fall over—whether he accepts that these acts were commissioned to undermine the human rights of the individuals? In a debate in this House in July last year on the Defamation Bill introduced by the noble Lord, Lord Lester, the Government promised that they would investigate and bring in legislation to deal with defamation. Are they now prepared to consider how the conflict between Article 8 and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights works against the individual’s rights? Will the Government put that in their promised consultation document or in a future Bill?

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, we all recognise that this goes very wide. I say to noble Lords opposite who tend to slip into saying “honourable Member” that one member of staff said to me the other day that they feared that the Benches in this Chamber were about to be reupholstered in green rather than red. We all understand why that is being said.

The serious questions of defamation and who should have been informed are very important. My understanding is that the police have informed all those about whom they have evidence that their phones were hacked. In addition, they have found a great many other names of people who were clearly targets of inquiry, but they do not have information on whether their phones were hacked. This is part of the ongoing and widening inquiry in which the police now have to be engaged.

Business of the House

Timing of Debates

11.42 am

Moved by Lord Strathclyde

That the debate on the motion in the name of Lord King of Bridgwater set down for today shall be limited to two hours and that in the name of Viscount Younger of Leckie to three hours.

Motion agreed.

Business of the House

Motion to Agree

11.42 am

Moved by Lord Strathclyde

That leave be given to advance the Report stage of the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Bill [HL] from Tuesday 1 February to Monday 31 January.

Lord Myners: My Lords, as the economy is pushed back in the direction of recession, inflation surges and every day we read about more job losses, the House can only welcome the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the architecture of economic management.

Motion agreed.

Earl Attlee: My Lords, I ask that noble Lords leaving the Chamber do so quietly.

Armed Forces: Post-service Welfare

Debate

11.44 am

Moved by Lord King of Bridgwater

To call attention to the physical and mental rehabilitation of military veterans and their post-service welfare; and to move for papers.

Lord King of Bridgwater: My Lords, I rise to call attention to the physical and mental rehabilitation of military veterans, and to issues of post-service welfare. I welcome this opportunity to bring before the House an issue on which I think every Member will share the wide public concern at the present time. I am grateful for the number of noble Lords who are determined to speak in the debate. I know that the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Boyce, who takes a keen interest in these matters and speaks with great authority, cannot unfortunately be here. He has a cast-iron excuse; he has to appear before the Iraq inquiry today, so the House will realise why he cannot be here. I have also received an apology from the noble Viscount, Lord Brookeborough, who takes a keen interest in these matters because of his military background. He has duties to Her Majesty as a Lord in Waiting at an investiture, so he, too, cannot be here.

It is no secret that the issues that we discuss today are in the public mind overwhelmingly because of the consequences of Operations Telic and Herrick. These were the names given to the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, I make clear that my observations relate not just to the casualties of those conflicts. I include those who served in Korea in what was a particularly nasty war for many. Some of my contemporaries, and some who I expected to see at university, did not come back from that bloody encounter. The mass Chinese attacks in some ways resembled World War I. As a national serviceman, I saw active service at the time, and some of my colleagues still bear the scars. I include also the veterans of the Falklands. I have seen many who faced the consequences of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and of the brave work of our forces during that time. I include members of the security forces and of the RUC. Many noble Lords will recall that we are also approaching the 20th anniversary of the ending of the first Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait. Many casualties occurred in that conflict.

I note one thing from recent discussion of these issues. I do not recall any discussion during my time as Secretary of State of the military covenant. It was taken for granted, it was implicit and, if pressed, people recognised that of course there were obligations. However, as the casualties and the challenges that we now face have grown, the importance of that implicit covenant being respected is now being put into written and public form. We now even have the niceties of deciding whether we have a no-disadvantage covenant or a citizen-plus covenant. These are the two alternatives: whether the objective should be that no one should suffer any disadvantage from their service, or whether the nation recognises that in some ways they should have enhanced recognition—citizen plus—for the service that they have given.

It is no secret that the pressure that we feel on this has to do with the length of the campaigns. I was involved in the first Gulf War, which was over almost in the twinkling of an eye. The build-up took months, but the whole campaign to liberate Kuwait took barely two months, with an air campaign and what was almost a five-day land campaign to free Kuwait from the Iraq invasion. Now we see that we have spent nearly 10 years in Afghanistan. We have been in Iraq for eight years. Will the Minister confirm the figure I heard that 180,000 service people are now veterans of either Iraq or Afghanistan? That is the scale of the challenge that we face. There is no question that while we very properly pay our respects, and the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and we in this House express our condolences to those who lose their lives, many of us recognise that the real and lasting tragedy is the scale of the appalling injuries that many come back with.

That is of course a consequence of the triumph of medical progress. I saw that in Northern Ireland; if we could get someone to hospital when they were still breathing, there was every chance that their lives could be saved. Many people who previously would never have survived are now coming back with appalling injuries, but medical triumphs ensure their survival.

That places heavy obligations and liabilities on their families, and on society as a whole, which has asked them to embark on those dangerous challenges.

After the scratchiness of this House too often in recent days, I pay tribute to what the previous Government did. I do not admire the campaigns in which they got us involved, but I recognise that they introduced a number of helpful measures, and I am very pleased that the present coalition Government recognise the importance of carrying on that work. I pay tribute to the incredible skill and wonderful competence of the medical profession, all the way from the combat medics on every patrol to the helicopter that may convey them back to Camp Bastion, to Camp Bastion itself, and to the outstanding treatment that they receive on transfer by air transport back to this country, into Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham and then on to Headley Court. This is a service and a quality. Someone can go out on patrol, and the next thing they know they are waking up 24 hours later in a hospital in Britain, getting the best medical attention that anyone could wish for.

Of course, that is when the challenge really develops. In this connection, there is no question that this is not just a job for the Government or the public services. One of the most moving things about recent events is the way in which charities have become such a key part of that activity. I doubt whether there is a single Member of your Lordships' House who has not had some contact with Help for Heroes, Combat Stress, ABF The Soldiers' Charity or the Royal British Legion. The Royal British Legion has just given its biggest donation in its history, £50 million over the next 10 years, to help some of those centres. Help for Heroes has made huge investments because of the response to its fundraising, which is recognition of public concern. I should declare an interest, because I am an ambassador for Alabaré Christian Care & Support, which has now established five homes for veterans. My sister happens to be the chairman of an organisation called the Community Self Build Agency. As part of a very enterprising idea, it is now getting self-build schemes going to help ex-servicemen veterans with housing, in which they do the building themselves and rebuild their life, their competence and confidence.

I am delighted to see the noble Lord, Lord Glenarthur, here. As we recognise the role of full-time servicemen, there is a particular challenge in this situation for reservists. They often come straight out of civilian life, they do not have the comfort and surroundings of the regimental family, and they are often scattered in different parts of the country. They come back from some of the most challenging combat situations and find themselves immediately back on civvie street among colleagues who do not understand anything of what they have been doing. We need to recognise their particular challenges.

We need to provide in so many ways, including financially. It is interesting that SSAFA and the Royal British Legion said that 60 per cent of the cases that they deal with are problems with debt management. In this connection, the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Boyce, conducted an important review. I hope the Minister can confirm that the Government are carrying forward the Armed Forces compensation scheme review,

because finance is obviously important. Far too many of our servicemen coming home are homeless. We need to give them proper access to social housing and advice as to how to access it. There needs to be proper recognition by local authorities of the priority that they should give to returning servicemen to ensure that they do not get left out.

The mental challenge will be with us for a long time. Although some physical injuries are all too apparent, the mental injuries may not be. We know that it may be 14 or 15 years before people become aware of them. The new provisions, which mean, as I understand them, that everyone is assessed on leaving the services for their mental health condition, are very important. We also need an outreach programme to check up on people. I commend Dr Liam Fox and Andrew Murrison, who both have the advantage of being doctors. They have for some time, when in opposition and now in government, taken a particular interest in mental stress. The point that Dr Liam Fox made in an article which some might have read in the *Sun* today is that people with mental health difficulties are the least likely to go to their doctors. We need to ensure that the Defence Medical Services give the NHS access to the records of patients who become patients of NHS doctors, so that they can be aware of some of the background. I pay tribute to the reservists who are doctors and who have already served in Afghanistan and Iraq, but doctors who have not served need help. I recognise the interest that the BMA is taking in that area to see how we can get more advice to doctors who have to deal with situations with which they have never previously had to deal with their civilian patients.

The issue is the strain that people face and the linkage between the Defence Medical Services and the health service, as the health service is now, impressively, gearing up to handle these situations. It is a matter of experience. It stretches all the way to the tragic shooting of the congressman in Tucson, Arizona. People said that her luck—and I hope that that luck will continue—was that one of the surgeons who treated her had experience of serious injuries in Afghanistan and knew the instant action that was needed. That has undoubtedly given her the chance that she has now, which that she would not otherwise have enjoyed.

Yesterday we had a further reminder of the tragedy with the 350th fatality in Afghanistan and the name of the serviceman who had lost his life being announced. We do not publish in any great detail the number of those who are wounded, and do not draw attention to the severity of some of those injuries. The Ministry of Defence has invented the phrase “life-changing injuries”, which, as we know, covers some very serious injuries indeed. Through-life support—not just support when there is public interest, as now, when we are very aware and when Wootton Bassett brings to people's attention so frequently the challenges that we face—is critical.

Our duty in this is to recognise the words of the *Army Doctrine Publication*:

“Soldiers will be called upon to make personal sacrifices—including the ultimate sacrifice—in the service of the Nation. In putting the needs of the Nation and the Army before their own, they forego some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their

[LORD KING OF BRIDGWATER]

families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service ... the system's loyalty to the individual—is obligation in the Military Covenant—is manifested in justice, fair rewards and life-long support to all who have soldiered”.

Many have stood on Remembrance Day, as I have on many occasions, saying, “We will remember them”. That, I think, should be our motto as we look at the through-life support that we owe those who have bravely served our country in appallingly difficult circumstances and who deserve nothing but our fullest support in the years ahead.

11.59 am

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord King, for introducing this timely and very important debate. I do not pretend to speak from any great knowledge of the military. Although my uncle and grandfather were military men, they died when I was a child, and national service, which meant that most families knew someone close who was in the services, ended when I was a teenager. In other words, I am one of that greater part of British society who have had no exposure to, and little understanding of, military life or the commitment, loyalty and sacrifices that, today, our young women and men who join the armed services make on our behalf.

I have one redeeming feature that makes me want to take part today. I have a beloved god-daughter who chose the Navy as her career. Her experiences, commitment and enjoyment of the service, as well as the maturity and wisdom she has gained, made me realise how much I needed to learn. I have also had the great advantage of taking part in the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, which aims to give parliamentarians such as me who have had little exposure to our armed services the chance to get some hands-on experience. I cannot commend the scheme too highly. It is run by the redoubtable Sir Neil Thorne, and it is a no-holds-barred opportunity to get under the skin of one of the services, as well as to gain an understanding of the generic issues that affect the Ministry of Defence and the services as a whole. I spent 22 days, over a year, with personnel at all levels and in a range of locations, including on board HMS “Liverpool” in the Falklands, listening and learning. I was impressed with the leadership, professionalism and care for the “Navy family” that I witnessed.

However, particular issues came to my attention that I feel are relevant to this debate. During that year, I was able to see for myself the reciprocal relationship that lies at the heart of the military covenant, which was referred to by the noble Lord, Lord King, and which I have no doubt will be explored in greater detail in a debate later today in your Lordships’ House. Under the military covenant, the Government expect the Armed Forces to carry out their duties in defence of the state to the best of their ability, up to and including the possibility of death in action. In return, the Armed Forces expect that they and their immediate dependants will be cared for and supported both during and after service, and it is the importance of that two-way expectation and understanding which prompts my remarks today.

Given our country’s continuing role in the military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is right that there should be a high level of public, media and political interest in the welfare of both serving members and veterans of the Armed Forces. That interest is frequently focused on the level of support that many veterans receive for physical and mental health problems once they have left the services. While focusing in this debate on veterans, I pay tribute to those currently in the service who give so much of themselves on our behalf. Too often, we, the public, realise only in times of conflict what they do for us, yet I know from my talks with serving men and women how much they feel that out of sight means out of mind.

There are currently some 5 million veterans in the UK with 8 million dependants. Of the 24,000 servicemen who leave the Armed Forces each year, most transfer seamlessly to civilian life, but a significant minority do not. Common mental health problems affect about one in four service personnel and veterans; alcohol abuse affects about one in five; and post-traumatic stress disorder one in 20. Other problems follow from this. Estimates suggest that around one in 10 homeless people in the UK are former members of the Armed Forces. A 2008 Prison Officers’ Association survey found that 8,500 veterans were in custody at any one time in the UK following conviction of a criminal offence. A further survey in 2009 found that 12,000 former armed services personnel were under the supervision of the probation service in England and Wales on either community sentences or parole. At that time, therefore, twice as many veterans—some 20,000—were in the criminal justice system as were serving in military operations in Afghanistan.

Noble Lords will be aware that many initiatives have been instigated to address these issues and to improve mental health services for our veterans. As the noble Lord, Lord King, affirmed, the previous Government had a strong track record, with the Armed Forces Bill in 2006, ensuring forces’ pay increases and investing in rehabilitation facilities. There was the £2 million package of measures, announced in April last year, which included the employment of 15 community psychiatric nurses to work in mental health trusts alongside existing specialist teams, the creation of a 24-hour helpline, and improved education and training of GPs to help them to identify veterans suffering mental health problems.

These initiatives will involve the veterans’ mental health charity, Combat Stress, and the Royal British Legion. I welcome these moves, which are clearly very much needed, and I express my admiration and support for the work already being done by these and other bodies, such as the Mental Health Foundation. I also warmly welcome the MoD’s excellent 2010 *Fighting Fit* report on the provision of mental health services for veterans and service personnel. I welcome, too, the endorsement in the other place by the Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, of the report’s key recommendations, including the creation of a Veterans Information Service to ensure follow-up of veterans after 12 months.

I refer also to the December 2010 report of the Taskforce on the Military Covenant. This comprehensive and eloquently argued document also supports the

Fighting Fit report, and I hope that, in his response, the Minister will be able to indicate the Government's response to the report's recommendations. Clearly, much is now being done to improve access for veterans to support, but much more needs to be done both to understand the origins and range of mental health problems that veterans may have and to provide accessible and appropriate services.

It is that last point that greatly concerns me. On leaving the services, the healthcare of veterans moves from being the responsibility of the MoD to that of the NHS, where they are treated alongside the rest of the UK population. However, many reports cite a lack of knowledge among GPs about the particular needs—especially the mental health needs—of our veterans, leading to a lack of referral to such specialist mental health services as are available. Can the Minister confirm to the House that the reorganisation plans for the NHS, which rely on GP decisions, will take this into account, as they must if veterans are to get proper treatment?

There is currently tremendous public sympathy for veterans who find themselves in difficulties in civilian life. As the report of the Taskforce on the Military Covenant report suggests, it is vital that we turn that sympathy into empathy. Our service men and women have given their all for our country; it is only right that we should reciprocate that support and provide the services that they need. We must play our part to ensure that they do not fall between the gaps.

Lord Wallace of Saltair: My Lords, I apologise that this debate has been cut to two hours. Perhaps I may encourage all other Members to emulate the excellent example just set and sit down when the Clock is still saying seven minutes.

12.07 pm

Lord Addington: My Lords, I shall bear that in mind. This is one of those debates in which everyone will have said everything about the subject before, but we need to say it again and again to remind people of the problems. It is also a debate in which, fortunately, we are able to have a degree of political unity.

The problems facing our military existed before the two most recent conflicts, but they had not forced their way into our attention in the same way. When they did surface, the previous Government reacted with surprising speed, considering the political process. They took the matter seriously and started to address it, and for that I thank them. However, the fact that they had to do so indicates that we had not addressed the problems correctly beforehand. Smaller conflicts involving less immediately politically sensitive issues and smaller numbers of people meant that the problems relating to the armed services had been ignored for a very long time, as had the need to prepare our personnel for life after the armed services. We must all take a degree of blame for that.

Basically, we take very young people and put them into the military preferably for fairly long periods—the British Army likes long-service troops. They are told what to do and we do not prepare them for life outside. That is becoming increasingly apparent. I do

not doubt that steps have been taken to improve that, but that was not done before. The fact that you are trained to be an excellent infantryman is apparently not the best preparation in a flexible job market, where IT skills are increasingly required and accuracy in handwriting is more valued in the workforce than ever before. The two are not compatible.

What can the military do? Its primary objective is to produce good service men and women and to make sure that they are ready to do that job. It is understandable that this issue has not been addressed properly. Taking on the idea of the military covenant, which has always been there, although I became aware of it only about a decade ago, we have to try to get involved in how we prepare people for life outside. Let us say that we have an 18 year-old young man, or possibly younger, almost fresh from school, who is placed in an environment where there is a structure. He is not expected to fill out forms or to decide things for himself and he is taken away from parents who could show him how to do that. He is trained for 12, 15 or whatever large number of years and we then we place him outside. Making sure that that transition is well managed will make everything else easier.

I come to the more obvious questions about those who have been severely injured and the more process-driven points, which I hope my noble friend will be able to answer fully, such as making sure that medical records are transferred more frequently and that doctors are more aware of mental health problems. I believe that doctors are now much more aware that there are different types of stress, but it is important to make sure that they can get to the expertise. We cannot expect the GP to do it all himself. If greater emphasis needs to be placed on different types of treatment, we must make sure that patients can be transferred quickly. Somebody who is not used to dealing with the outside world and whose treatment is delayed can be lost. It happens. If the transition is swifter and smoother, with no form-filling or dozens of interviews, people will get to the right help quickly. I could carry on for a great deal of time on the transition phase, but I will just say that preparation for that transition will allow us to get the best out of what we are doing. That is surely the first step.

I ask my noble friend whether we have been able to identify the major bumps in the process. Where does the process break down when people do not get the best health and support? Have ways to avoid those problems been identified? Greater awareness is one and greater intervention would be another. Have we found out where they are most needed? We talked about pinch-points in defence recruitment and retention. Where are the pinch-points for services afterwards?

I shall curtail my remarks. I could have talked at considerable length about those who have lost limbs and the ongoing processes. Possibly, they will get a slightly better deal as they are more visible, because of their injuries, than those who have minor problems that manifest themselves later on. Can we have an assurance that we will keep this under review and that the Government will encourage all those who are involved in the political class to ensure regular reviews? This will go on beyond the life of this Parliament, and possibly the next two or three.

12.14 pm

Baroness O’Loan: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord King, for tabling today’s debate and for giving us the opportunity to discuss the serious issues involved.

First, I declare an interest. I am the aunt of a young TA soldier who was 18 years old when he was seriously injured in Iraq in 2007. I know that it was the treatment that he received in the American military hospital in Basra, in Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham and in the rehabilitation offered at Headley Court that gave him the life that he has today, as is the case for many others. I pay tribute to those working so valiantly to help the wounded and disabled, including the British Limbless Ex-Service Men’s Association, Help for Heroes and the British Legion.

The *Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant* states that there needs to be a coherent national approach to trauma research to develop new technologies, particularly in,

“acute trauma, repair, reconstruction and long-term rehabilitation”. That is important, but equally important is the issue of mental health, on which all previous speakers have focused. I am talking about the mental health of veterans returning from conflict zones, whether or not they have been injured.

Provision for the care of veterans with mental health problems is fragmented and patchy. There have been various initiatives. In November 2006, the MoD launched the reserves mental health programme, but by 2008 84 per cent of GPs were unaware of its existence. It is of limited application and does not address all the needs. There are particular problems for the early service leavers who are discharged, for whatever reason, and who may carry the mental scars consequential on or consequent to their military experience into their civilian life. Those scars may have catastrophic consequences.

The Murrison report recommends an increase in the number of mental health professionals to one per two mental health trusts. Their role is only to identify cases and to refer them to veterans’ organisations and other professionals. There is no evidence that such identification has been carried out effectively and we do not know the extent to which veterans who are identified as suffering from mental health problems actually receive the care that they need. They are a forgotten and, possibly in some people’s minds, less important group. They do not carry the scars in the same way as those young men and women like my nephew, but the consequences can be equally life-limiting.

The maximum level of compensation for mental health disorders appears to be fixed under the review of Armed Forces compensation at £2,888. That is not a large sum for someone who may be incapable of permanent employment for the rest of their lives. The report acknowledges the fact that mental health services do not always fully address the needs of veterans. Pilot schemes have been established, but there is simply neither the level nor the quality of mental health provision that is needed.

These issues have been thought about at length. There is clearly some recognition of the problems faced by veterans with mental health needs, but they

come low down the list of priorities in general health service delivery. Of course, there may be a reluctance among veterans, particularly men, to identify themselves as suffering from service-related mental health problems. The DoH’s New Horizons mental health strategy states that the prevalence of mental disorders in serving personnel and veterans is broadly similar to that of the general population, yet the research done by the Mental Health Foundation found that the risk of suicide in men aged 24 years and younger who had left the Armed Forces was approximately two to three times higher than the risk for the same age group in the general and serving populations—and the risk for this age group is high. Research also shows that reservists who served in Iraq were almost twice as likely to have mental health problems as those who have not served in Iraq—26 per cent compared to 16 per cent. Reservists who served in Iraq are twice as likely to have PTSD as those who have not served in Iraq. I am sure that there will be similar figures for Afghanistan.

We know that there are high levels of alcoholism, suicide and mental health problems. This is not unique to the UK, but it is a fact of military life. Post-traumatic stress disorder is not uncommon among those who have been affected in any way by conflict. The triggers can vary and the symptoms are now well identified. The triggers can be very simple. I think of the young man I know who was part of a patrol sent to search a village. Passing children playing on the road, they threw a bottle of water to a little girl of five who was waving to them. They accomplished their task and were driving home when they saw her little body hanging from a tree, her throat cut, a warning to others not to collaborate with the troops. I think of others who have seen their colleagues blown to bits or who have tried to carry out immediate first aid on colleagues who are suffering from major traumatic injuries and who have died. I think of those who should have been in the patrol that never came back but for some reason were not and who suffer survivors’ guilt. I think of those who survived explosions, only to face the flashbacks, night terrors, sleeplessness and fear of crowds et cetera that are so symptomatic of trauma. Research also shows that subsequent traumatic experiences can cause flashbacks to the original experience, thus compounding the suffering.

PTSD and the various mental illnesses consequential on involvement in armed conflict are well identified. However, the reality on the ground is that people are naturally reluctant to present with mental health problems and may well delay until the condition becomes too serious. When they do present, the services are not as accessible or as available as they should be. It is not enough in many cases to take people in for a week’s group and individual therapy and send them home. There is a well identified and serious risk that exposure to brief therapy can retraumatise the traumatised, leaving them to face their terrors alone.

What happens in reality is that people go into a lottery of available mental health care. People can often end up in psychiatric hospitals, heavily medicated to keep them compliant and hence unable to make any journey towards recovery from their trauma. There are limited services offering cognitive behavioural therapy or therapy for PTSD and they are often located at too

great a distance for those incapable of individual travel. I think of one young man I know who cannot travel alone but faces a four-hour journey for one hour's therapy and a four-hour journey back.

My questions for the Government are: can we find out the extent and geographical incidence of mental ill health consequential on armed service? Can some more attention be paid to the difficulties faced by those with serious mental health problems in accessing treatment and to the fact that such treatment is so scarce?

One of the things about trauma is that it can lie dormant for 25 or 30 years and then manifest itself suddenly. As the noble Lord, Lord King, said, we are talking not just about Iraq and Afghanistan, but about Korea, Northern Ireland and all the other conflicts. The reality is that many of these people end up in prison. Veterans are disproportionately represented in the prison population. We do not need more research to tell us that there is a problem; we need more planning for a future in which those who are currently struggling can keep going. Many of those who will be afflicted by PTSD in the future will need care. Those who have served in locations as diverse as Northern Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan and Korea and who subsequently suffer the trauma of mental ill health in its various manifestations deserve our care.

12.22 pm

Lord Kakkar: My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord King of Bridgwater, for having secured this important debate. I reiterate the important points that he made about the success that is currently achieved in the acute management of injured service personnel in the battlefield and their successful early rehabilitation, which has resulted in saving these complex-injured casualties.

I shall focus on two issues. The first is how we should go about commissioning the longer-term care of injured service personnel once they are discharged from the services and the second is how we can organise long-term prospective research cohorts for research studies to allow us to understand the long-term physical and mental health needs of these veterans.

Veterans leaving the services represent a broad spectrum of complexity in their healthcare needs, from the complex-injured multiple amputee, where some of the early needs after discharge are very obvious, to those with more subtle injuries and the very large number of veterans who are apparently healthy at the time that they are discharged from the services but who are at risk of deteriorating health in the years and decades that follow their discharge.

The provision of medical care for veterans after discharge is, at best, haphazard. The majority of NHS civilian personnel have no military experience. As the noble Lord identified, some NHS personnel have military experience, but they are quite few. Therefore, the majority of doctors and clinical staff who will take responsibility for the care of discharged veterans will have little insight into the experience of that patient population. Under those circumstances, they may not always be in the best position to understand these specific patients or to provide the care that is necessary.

There are also important concerns about the transfer of medical information from Defence Medical Services to the NHS. This is a serious problem. At the moment, a final medical examination occurs prior to discharge and an FMed 133 form, which provides, at best, rudimentary medical information, is completed to provide civilian medical practitioners in the NHS with any pertinent medical history during service in the armed services. At best, this information is rudimentary and very frequently it does not reach the NHS general practitioner. In these circumstances, early arrangements for medical care are going to be poor and, importantly, as time progresses, whatever information was available that might be pertinent to the long-term healthcare needs will be lost. Service personnel may not be able to recall all that information, putting themselves at a great disadvantage in their longer-term medical care. Is any work taking place on trying to understand how better the transfer of medical information can occur between Defence Medical Services and the NHS, with particular reference to the establishment of the electronic patient record to transfer as much information as possible to ensure that the medium-term and long-term care of veterans after discharge from the services can be best secured?

There is an important opportunity to improve the training for civilian NHS staff on some of the information skills and knowledge that they will need to deal with quite important numbers of veterans who will present with physical or mental health needs. At the moment, some 24,000 military personnel leave the services every year, and 10,000 of them have recent combat experience. There are about 32,000 GPs, which means that on average a general practitioner will see one new veteran every 16 months. GPs are not going to have a large volume of patients, so the training and experience that they need to develop have to be specifically tailored.

I turn to how we should commission services in future. The Health and Social Care Bill was presented last week and will begin its passage through the other place shortly. It recognises the need to change all commissioning services, with greater emphasis on primary care commissioning of the majority of services by general practitioners. It also recognises that there are certain patient populations with very complex needs, for which there should be more central commissioning of services—so-called specialist commissioning. Does the Minister agree that complex-injured veterans discharged from the services represent a population of patients with complex, long-term, ongoing healthcare needs that could be considered to fall into a specialist commissioning group where either the NHS board commissions services specifically for this population of veterans, based on advice that it receives from Defence Medical Services, or commissioning responsibility is transferred to Defence Medical Services so that the services can be provided in centres that have the opportunity to provide all the specialist requirements in a holistic fashion to achieve the best possible clinical outcomes?

I believe that there is also a need to initiate a programme of research to address four important questions with regard to the health of veterans. The first is to look at what the long-term, ongoing physical and mental health needs are. As has been identified in

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this debate, our ability to provide acute medical care ensures that many more service personnel are surviving horrific injuries, but we have little knowledge about what the long-term needs will be in the years and decades hence. This research needs to be conducted on a prospective basis. Secondly, we need to understand how to provide rehabilitation to achieve the best healthcare outcomes for these personnel. Thirdly, we need to understand how to adopt new technology and innovation that will be available in the years to come to achieve the best quality of life. Fourthly, we need to be certain that we can assess what resources need to be provided over time to ensure that some of the potentially most vulnerable of our citizens, who are those to whom we owe the greatest debt, have healthcare services provided for them that they justifiably have a right to expect.

12.30 pm

Lord Glenarthur: My Lords, I, too, am most grateful to my noble friend Lord King for raising this important issue. I certainly join with all those who pay tribute not only to the fortitude of those who are so grievously injured on operations but to their families, friends and the professionals who have the difficult task of supporting them on their return. I have various interests to declare. I was a member of the National Employer Advisory Board for the reserves of Britain's Armed Forces for 14 years, for seven of which I was its chairman. I have been honorary colonel of a Territorial Army hospital support medical regiment for 10 years and for six years, concurrently, I have been honorary air commodore of a Royal Auxiliary Air Force medical unit. These specialist medical units regularly provide individuals—or even many individuals—to reinforce, and to provide specialists for, both regular and reserve medical units that are deployed.

As I have had substantial contact with many doctors, nurses and others, such as from the professions allied to medicine, who have the initial and subsequent care of servicemen with profound physical and mental trauma as a result of operations, I should like to concentrate my remarks on the reserves, particularly the medical reserves. From what I know, it is clear that many people deployed on operations in the medical field are seeing the most dreadful trauma that only a couple of years ago would not have been survivable. They often witness what was described to me yesterday as the “ultimate” in terms of trauma that they will ever see. They see perhaps the most awful experiences of their professional lives. The degree of preparation that the United Kingdom armed services gives all those who are due to deploy might be a major factor in helping the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder remain at a low level. However, we cannot afford to be complacent and we cannot be sure when repeated deployments will begin to take their toll and very real long-term issues of mental illness, requiring long-term rehabilitation, will become evident.

So far as the Defence Medical Services are concerned, a large number of their strength is made up of reservists. Some of these reservists, largely from the TA, deploy as formed units—perhaps as a field hospital taking over the manning and the operation of the medical facilities at Kandahar, Camp Bastion or in forward

locations. These medical staff are almost the only formed reserve units to be deployed nowadays on operations. However, they also rely heavily on the additional expertise of specialists from national units, such as my own represents.

Many of these staff, with wide experience in the NHS and the private health sector, are used to dealing with fairly horrific scenes—whether in an A&E department of a hospital or in the subsequent treatment of the sort of trauma that I described earlier—but, however professional or inured to witnessing the most distressing scenes these people are, there must be a real risk that the effect on the individual clinician might become cumulative. These clinicians are supremely professional, but they are human beings who are prone to the same emotions as any of us. One has to wonder whether there will come a time when continued regular exposure to the extreme horrors of war could lead to a substantial cumulative effect on the individuals, with worrying consequences for the future. Even the most experienced, hardened doctors who have been deployed many times often say that it takes a good three months to recover and to come to terms with what they have seen, and it takes much longer for those who are not so experienced. Can my noble friend say what steps are being taken within the MOD to be alert to this possibility? What steps might be taken to deal with that outcome should it occur?

The trauma facilities in Camp Bastion are absolutely first class—I saw them two years ago and I should like to see them again—and they have probably improved hugely since I last saw them. As the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, said, what is being achieved there in terms of the ability to treat trauma is quite astounding and, indeed, humbling. However, one cannot ignore the fact that, although the need to preserve life is a pre-eminent role of clinicians, there are huge, complex ethical issues involved, which can take their toll on even the most stoical and professional of clinicians. While our doctors and nurses are treating our own injured servicemen whom they know will have the very best clinical attention on their repatriation to the United Kingdom, they are also treating very seriously injured Afghan civilians and Afghan servicemen. In treating those people and saving their lives—however horrific their injuries and however limited might be their subsequent quality of life—one can all too readily understand that the clinicians face awful ethical and moral dilemma, because those people will not go back to the same sort of facilities that we have.

The British serviceman—man or woman—is an extraordinarily resilient being. One hears amazing stories of their sense of humour, their determination to overcome quite shocking injuries and their success in doing so. For those who can remain within the services while fulfilling other tasks, all is made easier by the sense of camaraderie that always prevails within the unit. I hope that the Government will accept that those who treat our servicemen may at some point also need special care and attention because of the effect of what they have had to deal with.

As my noble friend Lord King clearly stated, for reserve medical staff returning to their civilian places of work, however supportive and understanding senior

management may be of their experience on operational tours, that is not always the case with junior civilian colleagues. The latter may not easily have the same depth of understanding of what clinicians have gone through and have witnessed in the theatre of war. Those clinicians, however robust and resilient, can talk among themselves as a sort of safety valve when they are with their military unit colleagues. I urge my noble friend the Minister to impress upon his Ministry of Defence colleagues that they should be alert to the possibility of traumatic reaction requiring a degree of mental rehabilitation over time for these individuals in the future.

The reserves of all three services make up a crucial element of the deployable Defence Medical Services. I would go so far as to say that operational deployment of any sort would be impossible without them. We must be alert to the risks of continued deployment which these very well meaning and extraordinarily professional clinicians face.

12.38 pm

Lord Craig of Radley: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord King, on his choice of this topic. Much has changed and is still changing in the support and needs of military veterans. As I will describe, their expectations of support have changed greatly over the years. When I was commissioned into the Royal Air Force 60 years ago, the strength of the three Armed Forces was approaching 700,000—almost 10 times what we shall have as a result of the recent defence review—and the medical and dental services were scaled to match those numbers. In the 1950s, with many service hospitals in this country and overseas, it was normal for most of the clinical needs of veterans and their families to be met by the medical branches of the services. The NHS was in its infancy. The veterans—largely from the First and Second World Wars—would on average have been in their fifties or in their thirties, so few of that large number of veterans were yet senior citizens, with the illnesses and disabilities more associated with old age.

By the 1970s, with the end of national service and the much reduced size of the three services, a major review of the clinical support required for the Armed Forces led to the closure of a number of service hospitals and much reduced staffing of the medical branches. It was no longer feasible, except in overseas locations, to provide medical and dental care for families or any veterans, many of whom felt very let down as a result. However, the National Health Service, by then well established, was there to provide medical care to veterans and their families, so it was wrong for the Armed Forces medical branches, at a cost to the defence vote, to double up on what could be provided by the NHS.

By the 1990s, most of the veterans of World War One had died and the age of the majority of veterans had risen to the sixties and seventies. Life expectancy was greater than before, with more likelihood of illness due to increasing years. To the World War Two number could be added those who had done national service or who had been involved in the many insurgencies and other conflicts of the latter half of that century.

More recently, we have had the casualties and veterans of conflicts in the Falklands, the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan. Advances in medical care have seen the lives of many casualties of these most recent conflicts saved, but many will need continuous support for the rest of their lives.

A number of Government responses have been made to these developments, such as: numerous ministerial Statements about the need to do more; the previous Government's Command Paper *The National Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans*; the introduction of a Minister in MoD with specific responsibility for veterans; the setting up of a dedicated veterans agency; and improvements in the immediate medical support and care of veterans who had been injured and have not yet left their service at Birmingham Queen Elizabeth Hospital near Selly Oak, Headley Court and elsewhere.

Backing up these efforts have been the activities and commitment of the service charities—I declare an interest as an officeholder in a number of these charities, as in my declaration of interests—which have, as always, been very proactive in the interests of veterans. Noble Lords should be aware of the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations, whose membership consists of about 180 service and ex-service organisations, including 65 regimental associations. I should like to pay tribute to the able leadership of COBSEO's current chairman, Air Vice-Marshal Tony Stables, who has done much to motivate and co-ordinate the work of the organisation's membership in their help and support for veterans. He has been instrumental in winning lottery funding support for the Forces in Mind programme.

However, healthcare provision is but one of the potential needs of veterans, and poor psychiatric health is often associated with other problems of housing, welfare and finance. Important though the support and generosity of the service charities is, it is wrong for the Government to be overreliant on this sector. All should agree that the support of veterans—particularly those who have been injured physically or mentally in the course of their service for the Crown—is primarily the duty of Government. The current arrangements, while an improvement on what went before, still need further restructuring. The MoD, of course, has responsibility for the care and support of servicemen and women who are still on the active list, but with their transition to retired veterans, the link between them and the MoD is weakened and, with the passage of time, can be broken.

In the United States—admittedly with a much larger corps of veterans—a distinct and separate state department bears responsibility for veterans' affairs and is not an adjunct of the Department of Defense. Inevitably, inside our MoD there are bound to be conflicting pressures for resources and the needs of veterans, whether in pensions, compensation, health or other support, cannot be given the priority that is necessary to care for them properly. Building on the structure of Cm 7424 and its external reference group chaired by the Cabinet Office, could we not have a Minister for senior veterans, with the appropriate support and budget within the Cabinet Office? I fear that it is

[LORD CRAIG OF RADLEY]

all too clear that the present MoD's Minister with responsibility for veterans—this is not a personal criticism—is dismissive and given to writing bleak letters of blank refusal to any and every suggestion from members of COBSEO. Of course the financial situation does not make matters easy, but surely this is a transitory problem so far as veterans and their interests are concerned. Some indication that, as the economy recovers, there will be a proactive approach by Government to meeting the long-term support requirements of veterans would be welcome.

With the average length of life increasing, the skills of modern medicine and surgery and the recognition that there will be some without physical signs of disablement who are nevertheless afflicted with mental illness arising from their experiences in operations, there are going to be veterans spread across the length and breadth of the country who will need ongoing medical and other attention. If the Government are serious in their stated intention to do better for veterans—the ones who fought at risk to their lives, but lived through the conflicts—a new approach at senior ministerial level with the right proactive support for veterans' needs should be found.

12.46 pm

Lord Ramsbotham: My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Lord, Lord King, on obtaining this important debate. I agree with a great deal of what he said, including his mention of Alabaré and other organisations, his question about the implementation of the Armed Forces compensation scheme and his mention of homelessness. He will remember that during the Options for Change exercise—when he was the Secretary of State and I was the Adjutant-General for the Army, responsible for planning and conducting the reduction in its size by a third over three years—the issue of homelessness came up. Looking back, I think we can say that we did better for families than for single people, and we would not be the only ones who would have to admit that. He will also remember the discussions on resettlement, which the noble Lord, Lord Addington, mentioned.

I declare two interests, one as the vice-president of the Centre for Mental Health, which in October last year produced a document entitled *Across the Wire: Veterans, Mental Health and Vulnerability*. I commend it to all those who have not seen it because it reflects a wealth of experience in the professional mental health community. I am also president of the Veterans in Prison Association, which I will come to in a moment.

I fully accept that later today we are to have a debate, sponsored by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield, on the Armed Forces covenant, but I make no apology for starting from the covenant, particularly from the point made by my noble and gallant friend Lord Craig about the post and position of a Minister for veterans' affairs. I have mentioned several times in this House that I do not think that the MoD is the right place for a Minister for veterans' affairs because all the veteran affairs with which he is meant to be dealing are conducted not by the MoD but by the other Ministries involved, such as the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department

of Health, local government and so on. Unless he or she has outreach to those, the ministerial diktat will not reach to them. Bearing in mind how this Government approach the issues of the big society, I believe that veterans' affairs ought to be lifted firmly into the big society agenda.

I therefore recommend most strongly that the responsible Minister should not be a separate Minister in the Cabinet Office but that the veterans' portfolio should be added to that of the Minister for Civil Society, who already has cross-government responsibilities in this area. He or she would be supported by civil servants in the department. However, as has been recommended on more than one occasion, there should be a commissioner for veterans' affairs who is an independent, active participant in what is going on—an observer or ombudsman, if you like—and who has responsibility for overseeing the 24/7 operations in support of veterans and their families throughout the country. That job cannot be done by civil servants or by ministerial diktat. Unless someone is responsible and accountable for doing it, nothing will happen.

Other noble Lords have mentioned that many good things are happening. I have just seen a marvellous report, produced by the North East Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has conducted a regional review in the north-east of the health of the ex-service community. Fourteen local councils came together to produce 47 recommendations. When you look through a list of those people who are involved in implementing those recommendations, you find local authorities, housing federations, homes and communities agencies, social landlords, Jobcentre Plus, career transition partnerships, masses of voluntary sector organisations—both military and otherwise, NHS commissioning boards, public health observatories, mental health bodies, primary care organisations, GP consortia and so on. The fact that these things are being thought about, with it being realised how many people must be brought together, is very useful for government, provided that they can pick it up and run with it. For example, the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership has drawn up very sensible recommendations for the implementation of the findings of the Murrison report, mention of which has been made today. If you go into that, you will find an enormous number of organisations that are required to do work.

Good things are happening—we have mentioned the physical and mental health problems that are being dealt with on the battlefield and immediately afterwards—but it is long-term, lifelong support that is needed. I am very glad that 12 mobile personal recovery units are now going round and helping to supervise people's recovery. There will be four personnel recovery centres—one in Edinburgh, one in Catterick, one in Colchester and one in Tidworth—which will provide one-stop welfare shops for ex-service people and their families. There will be welfare support, a prosthetic support clinic—which I mentioned in the House the other day—physical and psychological support and family support. That is fine; this is being funded by organisations such as Help for Heroes as well as by government, but if these things, which provide an

admirable framework for all that we recognise is needed, are really to happen, they must be driven by someone who sees that they are done.

I mentioned my involvement with prison. It is sad to find the increasing number of ex-military personnel who end up in the hands of the criminal justice system. When you go into the reasons for that, you see that they are complex. Many of the people concerned have unwillingly returned to their original background, yet the support mechanism is not in place to help them. Much mention has been made of PTSD, but if you look at their problems, you see that three things stand out: alcohol, depression and anxiety. The anxiety is linked with an inability to cope. All this says to me that not only must treatment for post-traumatic stress and post-battle disorders be provided but treatment must be provided that is provided normally throughout the community, with the supplements that form the Armed Forces covenant and are given because the individuals concerned have been members of the services.

12.54 pm

Lord Sheikh: My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord King of Bridgwater for securing this important debate. The state in which a number of our veterans find themselves on leaving service should fill us all with concern. These men and women demonstrate unparalleled bravery in their defence of our country. We should therefore put provisions in place that give our veterans who suffer from a physical injury or a mental health illness all the support that they require for their rehabilitation.

My contribution will focus mainly on the mental health challenges facing a number of our veterans. A recent report by the King's Centre for Military Health Research reveals that almost 25 per cent of Iraq war veterans are suffering from mental health-related illnesses. The King's Centre is of the view that of the 180,000 service men and women who have served or are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, 48,000 veterans may suffer from an illness of this nature. The research states that 9,000 service personnel are at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder. This condition can lie dormant for a long period, yet its effects are terrible for those who suffer it. I welcome the Government's announcement to improve mental health services for veterans through the provision of 24-hour counselling, a support helpline and the introduction of 30 mental health nurses. Greater resources might be needed in areas that have a moderate-to-high percentage of veterans, as failure to do so might place a strain on local services. The coalition Government have doubled the operational service allowance, while amending the policy on rest and recuperation for service personnel deployed on operations. This, too, is welcome, as it will go towards addressing the impact of combat-related stress on our Armed Forces.

I fully support the provisions in the Armed Forces Bill that pertain to ensuring that the military covenant is honoured by government as a statutory duty. The Bill will also make it incumbent on the Secretary of State for Defence to report every year on steps that the Government are taking to support servicemen, veterans and their families. I look forward to debating the Bill when it reaches this House.

A more common mental health complaint among those who have served in the Armed Forces is depression. It has been found that those diagnosed with depression are more likely to be of lower rank or persons who are divorced or separated. One reason given for the prevalence of depression among veterans is a fear of not being able to secure a job on returning to civilian life, which in turn leads to a sense of despair. An unfortunate stigma is attached to mental health issues in our society. Regrettably, this is even worse among the Armed Forces.

It has been widely reported that many veterans who are suffering from mental health difficulties tend to hide their suffering. A number of service men and women have attributed this to the fact that they view acknowledgment of a mental health illness as a sign of weakness. In making the noble commitment to defend our nation, many of these brave men and women perhaps feel as though they are burdening their families and friends by sharing their mental trauma. I would be grateful if the Minister could inform your Lordships' House about any plans or campaigns that the Government will embark on to address this issue. Perhaps I may add that alcohol abuse among ex-members of the Armed Forces is double that among the British civilian population.

I was particularly heartened by the pledge in the SDSR to support ex-service personnel to enter tertiary education. This will provide those who have contributed so much to our national security with greater career choices on leaving the Army. I also take the opportunity to praise the decision to award scholarships to the children of service personnel who have lost their lives in active service since 1990. It will go towards expressing our gratitude to the children whose parents have made the ultimate sacrifice when defending our country.

I pay tribute to the excellent work undertaken by Combat Stress, the veterans' mental health charity, which provides veterans suffering from a mental health illness such as post-traumatic stress disorder with specialist care.

I praise the Big Lottery Fund for launching the Forces in Mind programme. This laudable initiative is aimed at supporting the psychological welfare of service personnel and ensuring that veterans are given all the required assistance in making the transition to civilian life.

I refer to a report produced by Dr Andrew Murrison MP, a man with strong credentials in medicine and in the Armed Forces. His report is entitled *Fighting Fit*, and has generated four principal recommendations. I ask the Minister to update your Lordships' House on the implementation of the recommendations suggested in that report. I understand that Dr Murrison is undertaking a review of prosthetic limbs, as it is important that a supply of limbs for those who need them is often inadequate in quantity and quality.

Our Armed Forces have played an important role in bringing stability to many regions around the world. Our servicemen perform a unique, challenging and selfless duty in protecting the civilians and citizens of this country who are supporting the Government's wider foreign policy objectives. The sacrifices of our Armed Forces, which are made to provide us with

[LORD SHEIKH]

safety, entitle them to specialist treatment. We have a moral and civil duty to ensure that we make necessary provision so that our veterans return to civilian life in good mental health.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Defence for establishing the Armed Forces Muslim Association. General Sir David Richards is the patron of the association, and I have rendered support to the association.

1.02 pm

Viscount Slim: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord King of Bridgwater, for a timely and pertinent debate. I am pleased to follow the noble Lord, Lord Sheikh, who does much for recruiting what we call the ethnic minorities. As I move among them myself a lot, I tell a British Muslim, a British Hindu or a British Sikh that it is payback time—and that it is time that more of them joined the reserve forces and the regular forces.

I worked almost monthly with at least four Ministers for Veterans from the previous Administration, and I pay tribute to them because they did a tremendous job. They woke up, as the noble Lord, Lord Addington, said, rather late—but when they woke up, great work was done. I particularly commend the veterans' badge which they instituted. I agree with the two noble and gallant Lords that the Minister for Veterans is in the wrong place; I have always felt this. I have also found that the weakness is in local government. I suggested to the previous Administration—and I nudge the Minister now—that although Governments do not like interfering with local government, one councillor should be deputised in each local government to take on veterans' affairs, particularly care of the wounded, both physically and mentally.

The Government talk about injury all the time, but when an overpaid soccer player gets a hack on the shins and rolls around as if he is in his last throes, he is injured. A serviceman is wounded. That word should be used more in the statistics and outpourings that our Government give. To be wounded is not much fun. However, it is a very proud thing for the individual to be wounded for his country. He is not given enough recognition today, as the noble Lord, Lord King, said, in our thinking and our daily workings. For those who are wounded, whether mentally or physically, a man or woman who takes a couple of bullets and a bunch of shrapnel or is blown up by an IED or wounded by a bit of cold steel when the fighting gets close, that is the most patriotic thing. I know that the word patriotism has not been a happy word lately in British jargon, but short of giving your life it is the next most patriotic action that you can take. We should look after these men and women.

I so agree with the two noble and gallant Lords that we need an organisation and a system—a fast track—to look after our veterans, and our wounded veterans in particular, as well as our widows. No one has mentioned widows today. I have 18,000 widows in the Burma Star Association, some of whom do not need any help but some of whom need a great deal. I understand—if I am wrong the Minister can put me right—that the Prime Minister said that he wants to look at the whole

business of the military covenant and maybe write a new one or add to the one that is already there. The covenant must encapsulate the fact that we should look after a soldier, a sailor or an airman from the day he joins to the day he dies. The covenant should show an enduring responsibility for looking after the veteran.

Overall, I agree with the noble and gallant Lords that great work is being done, but we need a system and an organisation. The two words are communication—because we must be able to order and run it—and organisation. We could go on talking, but I feel that enough has been said. I do not think that we give our wounded service men and women the honour that they deserve, and I believe that something should be done about it. I am rather encouraged by what has been said today.

1.08 pm

Lord Tunnicliffe: My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord King of Bridgwater, on securing this debate. I particularly thank him for this opening tribute to the previous Labour Government, which set the right tone for the debate. He had some thoughtful words about the covenant, particularly on mental health. While we have known about the problems of mental health in combat for many years, only now do we understand the depths of the problem.

The previous Government had a good record on the military covenant. We published the service personnel command paper—a first in government strategy—and made substantial investment in facilities such as Headley Court, including a new cognitive and mental health unit. We started community-based mental health pilots to provide veterans with expert assessment led by a community veterans' mental health therapist. We started a number of initiatives on mental health, particularly with *New Horizons: A Shared Vision for Mental Health*, published at the end of 2009, which contained seven action points for the MoD and the Department of Health, particularly to look after support for veterans.

We also made commitments during our election campaign to continue with those strategies, particularly on developing pilots to deal with combat stress, which we signed up to in January 2010. They would improve veterans' access to mental health facilities. If successful—and I hope they will be—we would have carried them forward. I hope that this Government will do so.

I move now to what the present Government are doing. There was an important commitment in the SDSR to:

“A dedicated 24-hour support line for veterans ... and ... 30 additional mental health nurses in Mental Health Trusts”. That commitment was made as a result of the *Fighting Fit* report by Andrew Murrison. I should like to know from the Minister just how much progress has been made in securing those resources.

The interesting *Fighting Fit* report built upon *New Horizons* in its opening section and made 13 recommendations, of which only a couple have been clearly signposted and committed to. Perhaps we saw some progress today from Dr Liam Fox when writing in the *Sun*. He said he would be, “working to implement them to provide much better and wider mental health support”.

That is good news. I hope that the Minister can report on progress. The Secretary of State also committed to changes in compensation. He said:

“Changes will be put into law next month to increase payment. They will nearly treble the maximum compensation for those suffering the severest mental health problems, and increase the amounts they are paid for life on leaving the forces”.

I hope that the Minister can give us more detail on what that commitment in the *Sun* from Dr Liam Fox actually means and to whom it will apply. Can the noble Lord confirm that the provisions will be introduced next month, how much it will cost the MoD, how many people will receive these higher payments, and what the exact scheme payments are that are being increased?

Looking further into the report, there are two particular recommendations on which, so far, there seems to have been no progress. They are a,

“Trial of an online early intervention service for serving personnel and veterans”,

and,

“Incorporation of a structured mental health system inquiry into existing medical examinations performed while serving”.

I hope that we can have some indication that these recommendations, together with the other recommendations in the report, are about to be implemented.

This has been an important debate and the areas in which improvement is necessary are understood. The Government have made some commitments to make these improvements, but I really need to know what the pace and future commitments are. My knowledge might have been illuminated by an article in the *News of the World*, which I would like the Minister to confirm or not. Not everyone will have reached as far as page 36 of last Sunday's edition, but there was an interview with Mr Nicholas Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, by the paper's chief political editor. He reported:

“Nick Clegg is to spearhead a huge drive to give better care for troops traumatised by war. The Deputy PM will soon unveil a ‘health for heroes’ service ... Under the scheme, millions of pounds of extra money will be pumped into the NHS to fight battlefield stress. A new screening programme will identify victims ... family doctors will get special training while an army of therapists will be drafted into hospitals to spot post-traumatic stress disorders”.

If all this is true, it is to be welcomed. However, it does not seem to relate to the more incremental and steady progress reported elsewhere. It has not been mentioned in Parliament and does not seem to accord with the plan in *Fighting Fit*. It is news to us and to the forces' charities. If the Minister is aware of the details of this programme, perhaps he could give us some indication of what extra money there is, where the millions of pounds will be spent, the timescale for implementation, and why it is to be announced by the Deputy Prime Minister, not the Secretary of State for Defence.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver): My Lords, we have had a very good debate and I thank my noble friend Lord King of Bridgwater for raising the important subject of the physical and mental rehabilitation of military veterans.

I always listen to and greatly value my noble friend's informed views on all aspects of defence policy. While he was Northern Ireland Secretary and then Defence Secretary, our Armed Forces were deployed in Northern Ireland and the Gulf where, as my noble friend said, combat operations to liberate Kuwait from occupation by the forces of Saddam Hussein began 20 years ago last week. Then, as today in Afghanistan, we witnessed the professionalism, dedication and courage of our servicemen and women. We should be justifiably proud of what they do on our behalf.

During these past two decades, our Armed Forces have been deployed in the most demanding areas of conflict. They have always risen to the challenges they faced, and done their duty unflinchingly. For those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, our condolences and sympathies are with those families and friends left behind. However, as my noble friends Lord King and Lord Glenarthur, and the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, said, injuries that were once fatal can now be survived, which is testament to the skill of our medical services. Indeed, the expertise honed on the battlefield is now subject to research at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham to determine how best that expertise can be used in the healthcare of civilian society. Just last week, we opened a brand new, ground-breaking surgical reconstruction and microbiology research centre in Birmingham.

However, today's soldiers, sailors, airmen and women will one day become veterans. They will look at how the previous generation is being cared for and supported. If we are found to be wanting, it will be a question not only of moral failure, but we will pay the price in recruitment and retention in our future Armed Forces. For some personnel who have been injured, a lifetime of care and treatment will be needed. As the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, pointed out, as a nation and a Government we have a moral responsibility to ensure that such injured personnel receive the care they deserve. As a Government we are committed to ensuring that they do. I reassure the noble Viscount, Lord Slim, that we will be honouring the covenant between the Armed Forces and the nation.

The Government share the concerns that have been expressed regarding the mental well-being of our former service personnel. We acknowledge that it can take many years for a psychological problem to manifest itself. In the most serious cases—and these are the minority—experiences on operations can result in post-traumatic stress disorder. We continue to work with Combat Stress in the fight against that most debilitating condition.

For other veterans, their mental health needs will continue to be met by the National Health Service, which should remain the main provider of healthcare for former service personnel. The NHS is working hard to develop the best models of care and support for the few with mental health problems. The MoD has contributed £500,000 towards six community-based NHS mental health pilot schemes for veterans in Stafford, Camden and Islington, Cardiff, Bishop Auckland, Plymouth and Edinburgh. They aim to make it easier for former service personnel to access help. I hope that that addresses the question asked by the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar.

[LORD ASTOR OF HEVER]

On 20 December, my right honourable friend, the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, announced the publication of an independent evaluation into these pilot schemes, conducted by the University of Sheffield's Centre for Psychological Services Research. The report identifies key components of successful services and makes a number of recommendations about the future planning of NHS mental healthcare services for veterans. I would also like to highlight the Medical Assessment Programme at St Thomas's Hospital, which continues to provide specialist mental health assessment of former service men and women with mental health problems who have undertaken operational service since 1982.

The coalition agreement set out our intention to provide extra support for former members of the Armed Forces with mental health needs, including PTSD. As part of that undertaking, Dr Andrew Murrison MP, who served as a medical doctor in the Royal Navy, was asked by the Prime Minister to conduct a study into the health of both serving and ex-service personnel to see what more can be done to assess and meet these needs. In the light of that work, on 6 October, the Defence Secretary announced that there would be funding for a 24-hour helpline for veterans and for 30 extra mental health nurses in mental health trusts. To answer the question asked by the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, my noble friend Lord Sheikh and the noble Lord, Lord Tunnicliffe, we will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and others to work towards implementing all Dr Murrison's recommendations, as well as those produced in the evaluation of the pilot schemes, to consider how they can be taken forward to provide the best possible mental healthcare for former service personnel.

In terms of general welfare provision, there is a range of services that former Armed Forces personnel may need to call on during the course of their lives, provided by many different agencies. I assure my noble friend Lord Addington that these will be constantly reviewed. Some have argued that it would be more cost effective to provide services for veterans if these were brought together in a single administration. We do not agree. Where a service is already provided by one department for the majority of the population, there needs to be a very strong case to set up a separate organisation to do the same thing for any special interest group—even one held in such high regard as veterans who have served the nation so well. Former service personnel live among us; they are not separate from the community that they have served to protect. For the most part, their needs—whether healthcare, housing or benefits—are the same as those of their fellow citizens.

We must also recognise that some of the support for veterans comes not from Government, but from the voluntary and community sector. I mentioned Combat Stress earlier and the noble Baroness, Lady O'Loan, in a well-researched speech, mentioned Help for Heroes. Sometimes, the service charities are described as filling in for what the Government should be doing. That does them a great disservice. It is not the place of the state to do everything. All of us have social responsibilities. The service charities are

one of the best examples of the big society in action and I pay tribute to the vital role that they play in our national life.

The noble Lord, Lord Ramsbotham, and the noble Viscount, Lord Slim, made important points about the position of the Minister for Veterans. Several formulae have been suggested over the years to strengthen the focus on veterans' issues. They range from the full-blown, US-style, Veterans Department, to more modest changes to government machinery. Some give a greater role to the Ministry of Defence, others look to central government departments to take on that responsibility. The creation of a Minister for Veterans was partly a response to that desire. The MoD's responsibility is finite. It can act as an advocate, or as an interlocutor, for ex-service personnel. But we do not want to tell the Department of Health and its devolved equivalents how best to deliver healthcare. Rather we want to see ex-service men and women treated correctly across government.

I want to mention briefly the role of the Medical Assessment Programme at St Thomas's Hospital Medical Assessment Programme at St Thomas's Hospital. This is part of the MoD and provides free and confidential advice on a wide range of issues. This can be provided in the home of a veteran, or by telephone, and is given by trained welfare managers. The Veterans Welfare service undertakes some 12,000 visits to former service personnel each year and 95 per cent declare themselves to be very satisfied. The welfare managers work closely with service charities and other voluntary organisations, local authorities and the Department for Work and Pensions.

I will try to answer as many questions as possible. If I do not answer them all, I assure noble Lords that I will write. My noble friend Lord King mentioned a possible figure of 180, 000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns. That is an old figure. The most recent figure, as at April 2010, is 236,000 service personnel who have served in Iraq, Afghanistan or both at least once.

The noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, paid tribute to the Armed Forces parliamentary scheme and I also admire enormously the excellent work that Sir Neil Thorne and that organisation carries out. The noble Baroness and my noble friend Lord Addington made some important points about the reorganisation of the National Health service. We continue to work closely with the NHS. As for the transfer of medical records from the MoD to the NHS, a summary of each medical history while in the Armed Forces, including the results of the discharge medical, is recorded and given to the individual to pass on to their GP. The form also includes information on how the GP can gain access to the individual's complete service medical records if required. We are working to simplify the process and, where it is possible to do so, to enable medical records to be available to GPs electronically.

My noble friend Lord Glenarthur made some very important points about medical reserves. He raised concerns about the cumulative effects of continual exposure to really stressful situations. We are very alert to this, and the cutting-edge medical care that our service men and women receive in the front line is constantly being upgraded.

To answer my noble friend's question, in November 2006 the MoD launched a new initiative, the Reserves Mental Health Programme. Under the programme, we liaise with the individual's GP and offer a mental health assessment. If they are diagnosed to have a combat-related condition, we offer the out-patient treatment via one of the MoD's 15 departments of community and mental health. The reserve forces continue to make a vital contribution to the ongoing success of military operations. In return, we have a duty of care to them, and this programme is an important enhancement of the medical services that we provide.

My noble friend Lord King asked about the review of the AFCS every five years. At this time we do not feel it necessary to conduct further reviews, but future changes will be considered by the Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation if the need arises.

I opened my speech by paying tribute to our Armed Forces. We ask them to do things on our behalf, and they do that willingly. We have a responsibility, not only as a Government but as a nation, to look after them. I hope that, by our explaining the Government's position on the important subjects of welfare and physical and mental care, noble Lords will accept that we take this responsibility very seriously.

1.31 pm

Lord King of Bridgwater: My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who have taken part in this debate. I thank the Minister for, as ever, his most conscientious and scrupulous attention to the debate and for his reply. This debate has been of real quality. People who are really interested in the subject have contributed to it from their different backgrounds and experience. In our present difficult times, this is the sort of the debate that this House can do extremely well and which makes a valuable contribution.

Without wishing to single anyone out, I thought that the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, was impressive, drawing on his wide medical experience that is of such great interest. The speech of the noble Lord, Lord Glenarthur, drew attention to the debt that we owe to the clinicians themselves who are facing appalling trauma situations and are willing to serve. Against that background, I am most grateful to all those who have taken part.

If there was one slightly contentious note that emerged among Members here today, it was this: we have made some progress in having a Veterans Minister, which we never had before, but now the issue is whether he is in the right place. I see the arguments about whether the Ministry of Defence is absolutely the right place. The only thing that I want to say is that plenty of people have got lost in the Cabinet Office before now, and putting a Minister of perhaps not the most senior rank in there might mean that they were never seen again. Whoever he is, and unless he is of Cabinet rank, he will need a sponsoring Cabinet Minister of some authority, and until someone can think of a better one, this is the answer. We have a Veterans Minister who has been a serving officer, which is a good start. I think that Andrew Robathan has plenty

of energy, and now we must make sure that that energy is applied with plenty of forcefulness. He knows his way around. He is a Deputy Chief Whip so he knows where some of the bodies are buried. That was an unfortunate phrase to use and I withdraw it, but that is a phrase often applied to Whips. He has considerable influence, and I hope that he will use it.

I shall add one point. Not every aspect has been covered, obviously, because of time reasons. There was one thing that did not come out in any speech. We use the word "veterans" as though they are all old men or women. A lot of so-called veterans now are extremely young, and one of the things that worries me, and I know that it worries the whole House, is the difficulty of employment opportunities for young people at this time. I know that my noble friend the Minister was not able to cover this in his speech, but I know the initiatives that are being made. I emphasise that giving these people self-respect is the best chance to recover from the difficulties and challenges that they may have faced, and opportunities of worthwhile employment are very high on that list.

I ended my earlier contribution by saying that many of us stand on Remembrance Day at war memorials up and down the country, and we say, "We will remember them". We say that we will remember the dead. The purpose of this debate was that we will remember the living as well, along with our duties and obligations to them. I am most grateful to all who have taken part. I beg leave to withdraw the Motion.

Motion withdrawn.

Tourism Debate

1.35 pm

Moved By The Viscount Younger of Leckie

To call attention to the value of tourism to the United Kingdom economy; and to move for papers.

The Viscount Younger of Leckie: My Lords, I am pleased to have the opportunity to open this debate on the subject of tourism in the UK and its value and importance to the UK economy. The debate has attracted no fewer than six maiden speakers and I look forward in anticipation to hearing the contributions from the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, my noble friend Lady Wheatcroft, my noble friend Lord Palmer of Childs Hill, the noble Lord, Lord Stoneham of Droxford, and my noble friends Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames and Lord Risby. I am delighted also to note the names of several distinguished Members of your Lordships' House down to speak. It is clearly a good day for Palmers and I look forward with interest to hearing from the other noble Lord, Lord Palmer, and from my noble friend Lord Lee of Trafford, a former Minister for Tourism.

Why do I think that this debate on tourism is important at this time? First, we in the United Kingdom are entering a busy and exciting period over the next two years when we will be welcoming many foreign visitors to our shores as a result of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the royal wedding and, of course, the Olympics in 2012. It is essential that we maximise this opportunity

[THE VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE]

and make it an exceptionally fruitful period for the country, both in increasing our invisible earnings and in ensuring that visitors enjoy the best possible experience with us. We must ensure that they return as so-called repeat business. This is particularly important for capturing a greater share of the Far East business.

Secondly, we must always remember that many UK nationals choose to holiday in this country. It is vital that people are encouraged to stay in the UK and made more aware of the benefits and pleasures of holidaying in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Of the total UK average household expenditure on holidays, only 36 per cent is spent in the UK. Yet the amount is not insignificant in monetary terms; in 2009, UK nationals spent 126 million nights away from home, which represented some £22 billion to the economy, primarily to the hotel and restaurant trade. There is clearly an opportunity to increase on this percentage expenditure.

Tourism is important at this time for a further reason. Your Lordships will hardly need reminding that we are enduring an unprecedented period of severe public sector cuts, as a result of having the largest deficit in the G20. This week's economic figures of near-zero growth for the final three months of last year confirm that our recovery is precarious, while the prospects for growth in early 2011 look less than encouraging. There are the added concerns of increasing energy costs and rising inflation.

Tourism provides an excellent opportunity to boost the economy. It is the third highest export earner for the UK, behind only the pharmaceuticals industry and the financial services sector. It generates £115 billion per year for the UK economy, which is equivalent to 8.9 per cent of UK gross domestic product, according to a recent Deloitte study. That breaks down between the UK's four countries as follows: England generates £96.7 billion, 8.6 per cent of GDP; Scotland £11.1 billion, 10.4 per cent; Wales £6.2 billion, 13.3 per cent; and Northern Ireland £1.5 billion, 4.9 per cent. Inbound tourists spend about £16 billion per year, thereby contributing £3 billion to the Exchequer.

Looking ahead, over the period 2010-20, the increased growth rate of visitors to the UK is expected to rise by 3.5 per cent per annum, which is ahead of the 2.9 per cent per annum on average forecast for the economy as a whole. Most importantly, there are some encouraging forecasts for employment. More than 250,000 jobs are expected to be created during this same period, to rise from 2.64 million to 2.89 million. Currently, one in 12 jobs in the UK is directly or indirectly supported by tourism. We can begin to see how tourism can play a vital role in rebalancing the economy. We cannot afford to miss that opportunity.

The tourism industry is often described in terms of the services and attractions offered to visitors—the product side. We know that there is great variety and that there are many exceptional, high-quality destinations in the UK, of which more later. However, are we doing enough as a kingdom to ask what the customer wants? The customer is, of course, the tourist—a generic term that describes anyone of any age, gender or nationality who is away from home or his native country, at leisure

and willing to spend money. For example, I heard recently of an Asian delegation booked into a UK hotel. Nobody had thought to check whether there was internet access there—an essential requirement for Asians—and there was a hasty rebooking. It is perhaps rather archaic, prosaic or both that many Asians perceive the UK as being the country of the high tea. Should we be encouraging a high tea start-up programme? Those are small examples but they matter at the coal face in understanding our customer.

The tourist always has a choice. Competition is fierce, notably for those travelling to Europe, with a rich choice of countries. According to the latest figures, from 2009, the UK is the sixth most-visited destination by international tourists, with 28 million staying visits. France is number two with 74.2 million and Germany number eight with 24.2 million. Between 2000 and 2010, the UK's international visitors increased by 37.4 per cent but France and Germany are still ahead of us, at 49.7 per cent and 85.6 per cent respectively. Crucially, we are falling behind in attracting visitors from the key emerging markets. France attracted eight times more visitors from China last year than did the UK, and Germany six times more. Nearly four times more visitors from Brazil went to France than to the UK and about 30 per cent more Brazilians visited Germany than the UK. France attracted visitors from India at a factor of more than 50 per cent more than the UK.

In briefly outlining an audit of UK competitiveness, let me start with the challenges. Britain ranks 133rd out of 133 nations on the specific issue of the cost of travel to a holiday destination. For example, a UK short stay visa costs £70. If you are a visitor travelling to other European countries at the same time, where you can obtain a multi-country Schengen visa at £50, the bill rises to £120. Add on to that the increase in the air passenger duty and the costs are considerable before you have even booked your flight, accommodation and transport. On the ease of booking flights, although airline seat capacity for internationals visiting this country has increased by 2.9 per cent, it increased more for France at 6.3 per cent and Germany at 5.5 per cent. A comparative reduction of our inbound route capacity pushes up prices for the tourist choosing to come to the UK.

There are other challenges. The VAT increase to 20 per cent is a necessary move by this coalition Government, but it inevitably decreases the spending power of all tourists in the UK. By contrast, Germany and France have reduced VAT rates for the hotel and restaurant sector. Although the exchange rate remains in our favour for encouraging foreign visitors, excessive volatility means instability. At present, that is providing a brake for those UK nationals seeking holidays abroad, which is in our favour. Overall, it remains expensive to holiday in Britain in comparative terms.

A further challenge is to encourage tourists to go further than their single-destination city. I accept London's primacy as one of the key holiday destinations in the world, but as many as 48 per cent of all UK visitors spend time in London and do not go further afield, whereas only 12 per cent visit Paris without enjoying thereafter the pleasures of France. The same applies to

14 per cent of visitors to New York and 10 per cent of those to Berlin. London enjoyed 11 times more visitors than Edinburgh, 18 times more than Manchester and 23 times more than Glasgow. I will be interested to hear the thoughts of my noble friend Lord Gardiner of Kimble on encouraging more visitors to the countryside.

Finally, I feel sure that the Government are reviewing our so-called welcome pack. For example, the average queue time for exiting customs at Heathrow remains at 45 minutes for foreign visitors.

On the positive side, what does the UK have to offer? Putting aside the small question of our weather, we are best placed, above all other countries, to offer a unique, varied and exciting opportunity that can be tailored for all visitors, with all vacation tastes, coming to the UK. There are quintessentially British festivals and events, from the highland games and county shows to cheese rolling and river dragon racing. There are theme parks and music festivals for the young. There is outstanding architecture, steeped in history, stretching back many centuries, from cathedrals to country churches. All these are accessible and appreciated over a particularly fertile landscape, from the north-west of Scotland—perhaps the last great wilderness in Europe—to Cornwall with its coves and beaches, Norfolk with its fascinating network of broads, the canals of Shropshire and Warwickshire, so enjoyed by American tourists, and, of course, Liverpool and Tyneside.

There are also many unseen treasures in the UK that can be exploited. For example, because of our geophysical make-up and our presence in the Gulf Stream, we have come to do gardens rather well, from Kent to Inverewe in Scotland and Cornwall. Even before the Eden Project, gardens in Cornwall alone generated more than a million visitors per year. I recently met a gentleman who had set up the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. From initially identifying six gardens for development, within the first year of research he had identified a further 306, all for eventual public viewing.

We have our priceless museums, notably in London but also in such places as Portsmouth, which represents our colourful maritime history with the “Mary Rose” and HMS “Victory”. There is also the Burrell Collection in Glasgow. It is, above all, through culture that the UK is perceived particularly to draw visitors and this gives us a competitive edge. The Nation Brands Index has indicated that Britain is ranked fourth out of 50 nations for having a vibrant and exciting contemporary culture; seventh as a nation with a rich cultural heritage; and eighth as a nation excelling in sport, with many foreign visitors coming to the UK for football alone. VisitBritain concludes that inbound tourist spending on our culture and heritage subsector is £4.5 billion. This alone supports more than 100,000 jobs in the UK. Overall, Britain is ranked fifth in terms of tourism. It must be perfectly possible to rise further in these rankings.

No stall for Britain can be set out without confidence in and scrutiny of the structure of tourism management in the UK, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the Department for Culture, Media and Sport there is a Tourism Minister. VisitBritain, which was the British Tourist Authority, is now responsible

for marketing Britain abroad, with a fund-matched £100 million partnership marketing fund earmarked specifically for the emerging markets. The quid pro quo is that cost reductions in administration of 50 per cent over four years must be made. The question that we must ask is whether the funding and the structure in place are correct.

It is as well to remember that the engine room of tourism works as a result of more than 125,000 privately owned businesses, 80 per cent of which have a turnover of less than £250,000 per year. The question that we have to ask is how best to help these local businesses, starting with more bank lending and greater tax incentives. I am sure that the Minister will refer to the imminent release of the Government’s tourism strategy document. In the mean time, I trust that there is enough stimulus for debate.

Finally, I leave your Lordships with a creative idea, which is that if we were to switch to SDST—for the uninitiated, that is the single/double summer time, with its lighter evenings—it is estimated that we could create tourism growth of between £2.5 billion and £3.5 billion and between 60,000 and 80,000 extra jobs. I beg to move.

1.49 pm

Lord Christopher: My Lords, first, I thank the noble Viscount and congratulate him on getting this debate on to the Order Paper. Unbeknown to him, it has provided me with an opportunity to raise the matter which was burning in my soul. He mentioned Cornwall, and Cornwall is part of it. I should also say that as it is a discrete matter, I thought it sensible to have a word with the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, yesterday to ensure that she, at least, was certainly not caught unawares on an apolitical matter.

It concerns the Isles of Scilly, which are a string of islands 37 miles by sea south-west of Penzance, five of which are inhabited. The population is around 2,000—it is probably on the low side rather than the higher—and tourism is the principal source of income. Almost all other sources have disappeared. The flowers have gone, either abroad or to Lincolnshire, and are a minimum part of their livelihood. The majority of the visitors go by sea. You can go by air and when I go, I usually try to do that, although you can be diverted to the ferry if it is too bad for planes to fly. However, the planes have to be small because the runway is short. There are also helicopters.

Two vessels ply between Penzance and Scilly, a passenger vessel and a freight vessel. They are owned by the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company, which was set up in 1920. Prior to that, since 1859, all transport to the islands was undertaken by the Ministry of Shipping, which must have disappeared at some time in the past. The passenger ferry is the custom-built “Scillonian III”, which will be 35 years old next year. The freighter, the “Gry Maritha”, is over 30 years old and takes 95 per cent of the freight. As with many islands around our coast, the only way of getting anything from nails to door knockers is by sea. That freight vessel was in fact a Norwegian freighter. I will come back to that issue after getting around to the matter of the “Scillonian”.

[LORD CHRISTOPHER]

The “Scillonian” takes 90,000 passengers a year. It had a refit in 1999 but, despite that, it will not get a maritime coastguard certificate after 2012. In other words, it will go out of service. Since 2002—over eight years ago—there have been discussions and explorations of what to do about that risk of losing the passenger vessel. The conclusions have been twofold: that there should be a new, dual-purpose ferry ordered and built and that there would have to be some harbour improvements, both in Scilly and in Penzance. The market for a second-hand vessel has been thoroughly researched but nothing that is likely to be suitable has been found. The harbour improvements have now been agreed but why is there not a vessel somewhere around the world at a time when, on the whole, sea transport is being either limited or transferred to a very large vessel?

Essentially, there are two factors. The vessel has to have a draught of only three metres and it must be able to sit on the seabed, because the high tides literally leave little or no water in the harbour area. There have been consultations with the Department for Transport and with Cornwall Council, which led to revised plans that saved a good deal of money. For example, they changed the specification of the vessel, reducing its potential speed from 20 knots to 15, and they retendered. We are now left with a total cost, excluding the harbour works, of £62 million. Under the outcome of the discussions this is to be shared, with £10 million coming from Cornwall Council, £11.75 million from a European grant and £40.3 million from the Department for Transport. We expected an answer from the Department for Transport by the end of this month but it is clearly not going to come. I understand that it is not now likely to arrive before the end of February. I do not know the reasons for that. On 16 February, a finance meeting of Cornwall Council will take place. There is a very real risk that it will decide that, given present circumstances, it cannot come up with this money. If that happens, the vessel will not be ordered.

There is also a risk with the European grant which has gone on for so long. There is an end-date, of which I am not aware, but there is a risk that the money will go elsewhere. Many projects around the country are looking for money from Europe, so this service could end in 2012. If that happens, there will be a direct loss of 79 jobs on the ferry service itself. There are only 1,272 full-time jobs throughout these islands, 30 per cent of which are related to hotels and restaurants, so there is a total potential job loss of around 380. That is not the national figure of one in 12 which the noble Viscount mentioned but represents something like four in 12 of all the work opportunities on these islands. Seventy per cent of the 380 jobs are related to tourism. Therefore, we have a potential job loss approaching a third, plus, of course, marginal losses relating to tourist spending, which would substantially disappear. It would be a major tragedy if these islands were effectively lost to tourism.

I hope that the points I have raised will find support around the Chamber and that we can look to accelerate a positive decision on this matter. Delay is no longer a wise or safe option. I will seek to follow this up as the days go by.

1.57 pm

Lord Wigley: My Lords, I hope that I am not being precocious in making my maiden speech so soon after being introduced to your Lordships’ House. I am grateful for the opportunity to do so as I felt immensely frustrated yesterday in the debate on the parliamentary seats in Wales as I could not even thank noble Lords who were being kind to me. Today’s Motion relating to tourism is important to Wales and is close to my heart.

Before addressing this subject, I thank colleagues and officers of your Lordships’ House for the kindness that has been shown to me. I particularly thank my supporters on Monday, my noble friends Lord Elis-Thomas and Lord Faulkner of Worcester, who I am glad to see are both present, for all their help and encouragement over a protracted period. I also thank the Cross-Benchers for allowing me to join their ranks and for the help given by their staff. It has been a very great pleasure to meet so many former colleagues. The warmth of their welcome has been a moving experience.

When we were elected MPs in 1974, my noble friend Lord Elis-Thomas and I were among the youngest Members of Parliament. It was once suggested that the two of us entered the place as revolutionaries and departed as mere reformers. But if the objectives which we then had, and to which I still aspire, of a new relationship between the nations of these islands can be achieved by reforming the structures of government, that is all to the good. Revolutions can be messy and painful. If the process of devolution allows Wales on matters such as tourism to take appropriate decisions on an-all Wales level, and to have its voice heard when other decisions are taken on a wider basis, that is also to the good.

I also thank those of all parties, and those of no party allegiance, who, while not necessarily agreeing with our politics, have supported Plaid Cymru’s bid to have a formal presence in this Chamber. For many years my party did not seek a voice in your Lordships’ House. It reconsidered its position after the Government of Wales Act 2006, which stipulated that our National Assembly could legislate in devolved matters such as tourism only with the agreement of both Chambers at Westminster. Many in my party felt that we should make our views known whenever and wherever the interests of Wales were at stake, on the basis of our country’s long-standing commitment to social justice and our wish to shoulder our responsibilities towards a wider world.

We see Wales in an international context. That is relevant to today’s debate. Tourism is a major industry in Wales. As we heard from the noble Viscount, it is worth £6 billion a year and generates almost 10 per cent of our jobs. My former constituency of Caernarfon contained the summit of Snowdon, the Menai Straits, the glorious Llyn peninsula, a phalanx of castles and several of the spectacular little trains of Wales. It is a Mecca for tourists. Wales’s major events programme has succeeded in promoting Wales as an international tourism destination. We hosted the highly successful Ryder Cup last autumn, and an Ashes test the previous year. When people attend such events, they come not only to Wales but to other parts of Britain. International visitors to Wales may fly in via Manchester or London

as well as Cardiff. The benefits will be felt all around these islands, and I hope that those who are primarily attracted to Scotland, Ireland or England will also visit Wales.

I imagine that public policy is geared to spreading the economic benefits of tourism around these islands. However, there is scope for improved signposting of such opportunities, so that visitors to Britain are aware of the wide variety of attractions across these islands. There is a huge opportunity to do this in the context of the forthcoming Olympic Games, and there is an onus on public bodies to co-operate. There is a need to use technology creatively to engage with potential visitors, providing reliable advance information online, not just about places but about activities.

We in Wales are particularly conscious of the contribution that cultural tourism can make to the economy. Music is a big attraction for overseas visitors. It is not just renowned institutions like the Llangollen International Music Eisteddfod that attract people from around the globe. A valuable role is played by local festivals such as the Brecon jazz festival and the Green Man festival. I declare an interest in this context because my wife, son and daughter are all involved in such cultural events.

In 2011, Visit Wales will also support events such as the Glanusk international horse trials, the Heineken Cup final and the rugby league Millennium Magic weekend. Visit Wales has three EU tourism projects on stream with an investment of £53 million, together with a £90 million heritage tourism project, also supported by the EU. A VisitBritain survey of 10,000 potential overseas visitors identified Wales's historic castles as the top UK attraction, beating Buckingham Palace into second place.

Co-operation with UK agencies can maximise the benefit that we get from such visitors. One good example of co-operation between public bodies on an all-Wales and a UK level is that which has enabled sculptures from the Dazu world heritage site in China to feature in an exhibition that opened in Cardiff this week. It will only be seen in Wales and it is the first time that the exhibits have left China. This exciting development has been made possible by the co-operation between the Government of Wales, our National Museum and the Chongqing Culture Bureau through the British Council's Connections through Culture programme in China. In mentioning China, we must be aware of how the demographics of tourism are changing, with an increasing number of potential visitors with disposable income coming from China and other developing countries.

There are other opportunities to work together to attract major events to the UK, such as the WOMEX world music showcase. This exciting project will bring together to the UK, for three to five days, 2,700 delegates from 92 countries, mainly programmers of international festivals and venues worldwide, some 450 world music artists and crew and 400 journalists. Cardiff is one of the cities shortlisted for the next WOMEX in 2013, and there is already positive co-operation between various key bodies in Wales and on a UK level to turn this into reality.

In regarding tourism as a major plank of economic policy, we certainly have the enthusiastic support of the Welsh Government. It is worth noting that the Minister, Alun Ffred Jones AM, has responsibility for heritage, culture and sport and tourism. However, he will be able to play that much greater a role in developing international tourism if he can work hand in glove with the UK Minister in proposing or supporting initiatives.

I hope that in attacking the international markets, the diversity of the tourism product within the UK can be used as a positive feature on which to build. I was glad to note a key recommendation of the recent report of the British Hospitality Association entitled *Creating Jobs in Britain*, which many of your Lordships will have received. It stated:

“Joining up—to a greater degree—with colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to enhance the visibility and reach of Britain as an international tourism destination across the world”, should be a key objective. I am certain that the Welsh Minister for Tourism would endorse that; I have discussed the matter with him. He would welcome the chance to develop his ideas on a partnership basis.

I am delighted that my first contribution to your Lordships' Chamber should be on this subject, and I am grateful for the generous hearing that has been afforded to me today.

2.05 pm

Lord Lee of Trafford: My Lords, first, I declare an interest as the chairman of the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions—40 of our major attractions, all of which get more than 1 million visitors a year. I am delighted to say that National Museum Wales is one of our members. I am also absolutely delighted that 17 Members of your Lordships' House are speaking today, including six who are delivering their maiden speech. I must say that this is far more than we normally get in a tourism debate; nor do we normally have the same number of peers speaking as there are peers in the Weston-super-Mare constituency of our present Tourism Minister.

I pay particular tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, for his maiden speech, which we all found fascinating. He and I spent many years together in the other place. He was hugely respected. He is a magnificent ambassador for Wales, and has done a huge amount for the disadvantaged and the disabled. We look forward to many excellent contributions from him over the years; from all sides of the House, we welcome him.

I also congratulate the noble Viscount on moving the debate. I had the privilege of serving under his father as a junior Minister in the Ministry of Defence. As a Minister, he commanded huge respect and was a gentleman in the very finest sense. I am delighted that his son is moving our debate today.

Tourism is probably the number one industry in more parliamentary constituencies than any other industry, yet previous Governments have paid little regard to it. It has hardly featured in party election manifestos. Over the years, there has been a steady reduction in the funding of our national tourist boards. Past Prime Ministers have not paid a great deal of interest. Gordon Brown could hardly be described as

[LORD LEE OF TRAFFORD]

the happy holidaymaker. Tony Blair tended to prefer warmer climes in Tuscany. At least the present Prime Minister is spending a little more time in this country.

The Government regard the chair of our national tourist board, VisitBritain, as only a six-day-a-month job, which is frankly ridiculous given the scale of the industry, as we heard earlier. Of course, tourism is not in the title of its sponsoring Ministry, the DCMS. As we have heard, it is a huge wealth creator and, potentially, a huge jobs creator. We must all be conscious of the number of overseas people who provide most of the workforce in so many of our major hotels and restaurants. There surely must be great opportunities for many of those in the UK who are at present, sadly, unemployed.

Many people tend to denigrate tourism as a service industry, but of course there is a relationship between service and manufacture. When I was Tourism Minister in the 1980s, the largest steel contract at that time was placed by the Blackpool Pleasure Beach for one of its big new rides. A big hotel development programme is currently under way in London, as we will no doubt shortly hear from the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine. Eighty per cent of the content of a new hotel used to be of UK-manufactured origin. As for our civil airline industry, we should think about how many of the aircraft carry tourists. Therefore, there is a relationship between service and manufacture.

Our domestic tourism industry is relatively buoyant at present. One has only to look at the number of people who increasingly caravan. The figures from the Caravan Club show an amazing growth in recent years. Of course, as was said a little earlier, we have a tremendous national heritage with our great museums and galleries, but they need extra resources. I ask the Minister whether the Treasury is making any progress in encouraging lifetime giving by those who are willing and have the resource to support many of our great heritage institutions.

As for the regions, there is considerable concern at the phasing out of the RDAs, which used to provide most of the funding for the destination management organisations. It is of considerable concern to read today that Visit Lincolnshire, the county council body that promotes Lincolnshire and tourism in that county, has been forced into administration after apparently losing £670,000 of funding.

However, the biggest single boost that the Government could give our tourism industry would be to support the Lighter Later campaign by altering the clocks and extending the useful hours of daylight. I was absolutely delighted that this was referred to by the noble Viscount, Lord Younger, who is a Scot, as it is of course from Scotland that historically the criticism of a possible change has come, so I am delighted to hear his support for this proposal.

There is huge potential in overseas markets; China has already been referred to by other speakers. The visa situation is particularly unsatisfactory, and I end by reading an e-mail that I received yesterday from the managing editor of *China Ethos*:

“The UK is a very attractive tourist destination to the Chinese people. However, their enthusiasm to holiday in the UK is dampened down by the inconvenience encountered in obtaining a separate

UK tourism visa in addition to a Schengen visa which allows entry to most European countries. Unless visitors have specific reason to come to the UK on their European trip, most will not bother applying for a UK visa due to the elaborate and time-consuming procedures. It clearly seems that the UK is losing out by keeping its door shut to the wealthy Chinese tourist on a shopping spree in Europe. In 2010, Chinese shoppers alone contributed to nearly a third of the UK post Xmas sales in luxury goods”.

2.12 pm

The Lord Bishop of Hereford: My Lords, together with the noble Lord, Lord Lee, I am delighted to be able to pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, for his excellent maiden speech. I look forward not only to further speeches from him but to the other maiden speeches that follow. Perhaps none of us can compete with the beauty of the area in which the noble Lord had the privilege of representing the constituency.

The diocese of Hereford covers not only Herefordshire but south Shropshire, and I am told that the border country of the Wye Valley claims to have been the place where tourism began. Other noble Lords might wish to contest that, but that is what the people there say, and they do so on the basis that the Wye Valley attracted artists to the area in the 19th century.

I pick up the theme with which the noble Viscount began and others have continued: the opportunities for development and growth in tourism throughout the United Kingdom. Reference has already been made to the number of jobs that could be added—more than 200,000 are anticipated—and to the research; the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, referred to this. It will not surprise your Lordships that I want to connect it to visits to churches.

Forty-five per cent of grade 1 listed buildings in England are churches. That is a staggering number. If any other organisation or institution, apart from the church, was responsible for quite that number, I have no doubt that it would receive more attention. It means, therefore, that we are in the unique position of being able to welcome, as we do, visitors to our churches throughout the country. In our diocese, 71 per cent of the churches I know stay open all the time. They are there to welcome visitors and, indeed, do so free of charge. I am told that more than 70 per cent of the population have visited churches during the past year. Obviously, many have done so for the primary reason of our existence, for worship, but not exclusively or only for that.

Visitors are welcome for all the different reasons why they come. Some come for the architecture, history, beauty and heritage that churches have; and an increasing number, which again will be no surprise, come to explore family history, which has become such an interest for so many. As the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, said, we can host concerts and other cultural activities in our churches and church buildings in Wales. There is also nature and wildlife in our churchyards, and the opportunity that the undisturbed ground provides. The charity, Caring for God's Acre, which began in our area, stresses that and wants to encourage other churchyards to connect with the work that it does. Churches also provide a place for quiet or silent reflection, spirituality, sacred space, and so on.

In England there are 43 Anglican cathedrals, which between them attract nearly 10 million visitors a year. Again, that is a vast contribution. There are 16,000 Anglican churches in England and the welcome that they give. We do not have the particular statistics, but they are there to encourage visitors and connect with local communities. Again, in our own diocese we are privileged to have so many architectural gems, such as Kilpeck, Abbey Dore, Ludlow and, of course, our own cathedral, which has 200,000 visitors a year. It is more visited than anywhere else in Herefordshire, which in itself emphasises the importance of our churches and cathedrals within the realm of tourism. Perhaps the scope to develop and extend that work is neglected. A cathedral close project in Hereford is the biggest current tourism investment in the county; more than £5 million goes into that. Only last week the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, working with Durham diocese, put forward the twin monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow as the latest UK nomination for World Heritage status. There are nearly 30 World Heritage sites in the UK, four of which involve church buildings. That is yet another way of stressing the importance and contribution that they make.

As I conclude, I wish to emphasise not only the churches' potential for growth in this regard, as in so many other aspects of tourism in our nation. I imagine I was not alone in being concerned to hear from the noble Viscount how much we have fallen behind France and Germany in the development of tourism in the past few years. I shall therefore end with a question for Her Majesty's Government. How are we to see funding support for tourism in the future, particularly in the post-regional development agency era and without the contributions that it was able to make more locally? Partnership funding for a Herefordshire churches tourism project in my area, sadly, had to stop. That weakens the way in which we can work together so that an area such as this can grow. I would love those aspects to be reversed so that instead of getting weaker, we can not only get stronger but can work more fully in partnership and perhaps speed up the development and rate of growth of tourism in our own United Kingdom.

2.19 pm

Baroness Wheatcroft: My Lords, I rise to make my maiden speech with some nervousness, particularly after hearing the eloquence of another newcomer, the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, but that nervousness would be much worse had it not been for the extraordinarily generous welcome I have received from all sides of this House. Having been introduced almost three weeks ago, many noble Lords have been at pains and pained to say that it is not always like this here. Nevertheless, the warm reception for this one of very many newcomers has been hugely appreciated. I am delighted and honoured to be among you. I will always be grateful to my noble friends Lord Moynihan and Lord Oakeshott of Seagrove Bay, two genuine friends of very long standing, who introduced me in keeping with the coalition spirit. I add my tribute to the tolerance, good humour and unstinting helpfulness of the staff here. As we debate the importance of the tourism industry, I reflect on how some corners of that industry might benefit from

emulating the behaviour of those who look after us here. It would be wonderful work experience for anyone contemplating going into tourism.

I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Younger of Leckie for initiating this important debate. My experience of working in the hospitality industry is limited to student spells behind a bar. Most of my career has been in journalism. It started when I replied to an advertisement in a daily newspaper, which stated: "Backdoor to Fleet Street". It was so far back that it was in Woolwich, but it fulfilled its promise and enabled me to build a long and highly enjoyable career in national newspapers, where I concentrated on business and finance. I spent nine years as business editor of the *Times* and left there to edit the *Sunday Telegraph*. I take this opportunity to apologise humbly to any of your Lordships to whom in that capacity I might have caused any offence. It was never personal. Most recently, I was editor in chief of the *Wall Street Journal Europe*, but before joining that paper I took the opportunity to see business from the inside and joined the boards of a property company and a bank, Barclays. As noble Lords will know, journalists vie only with MPs for rank in the public's estimation. My husband hoped that my standing might improve when I ventured into business, but unfortunately becoming a bank director did not provide that uplift. He is delighted with my new role and, in a brief Oscar moment, I thank him and our family for their support.

Over the years, I have chronicled the successes and failures of businesses and economic policies. I do not underestimate the difficulties of getting either right. However, as the UK seeks to regenerate its economy, I have no doubt that tourism has a vital role to play. This country has unique attractions. They draw visitors from around the globe, as we have heard, but they could, and should, draw more. I declare an interest here as I am lucky enough to be a trustee of the British Museum and the Royal Albert Hall, two very special—indeed, unique—institutions that both play almost to capacity, and on their behalf I join my noble friend Lord Lee in pleading for more help in encouraging philanthropy in this country.

If our tourism industry is to thrive, we need to nurture it. Noble Lords might not be surprised to hear that I believe that this is predominantly a job for the private sector and not for government. I fear that tourism, like so much of British business, might suffer from the short-termism that afflicts private sector investment today.

Tourism in this country is served by many small, striving businesses. Although it already accounts, as we have heard, for 8 per cent of total employment in the country, it has the scope to generate many more much needed new jobs. The development of a Disneyland, an Alton Towers or a major hotel complex requires long-term investment, not just in the physical structure but in seeing it through the planning process, the brand building and the employee training that tourist attractions need if they are to thrive. That is miles away from the short-term horizons that dominate much of today's investment industry.

Too much of the financial world has moved a long way from the concept of money being invested to build businesses and create jobs. The financial crisis

[BARONESS WHEATCROFT]

had many causes, but at least some of the blame must lie with investors. Many of them had not the faintest idea of what was going on in the banks that they owned. They were there as traders who watched symbols on a screen, anxious to make a quick buck. They were not interested in the concept of long-term ownership in building a business. That attitude, I am afraid, characterises much of what now masquerades under the label of investment.

We need to rekindle the appetite among investors for backing real businesses, not merely trading in stocks. A first step would be to encourage those whose money is in pension funds and savings plans to take a real interest in the way in which their cash is employed. Building successful businesses with long-term futures in many sectors, including the tourism sector, is in their best interests.

Finally, I echo the plea of my noble friend Lord Younger of Leckie in asking that we consider resetting our clocks. Putting Britain's clocks on the same time as most of Europe could, so we are told, bolster spending by another £3.5 billion a year. Holidaymakers tend not to be early risers. Delaying dusk by an hour will apparently coax the pounds from their pockets. I trust that this is a topic to which this House will return, because as we strive to rebuild our economy, the potential return from just turning back the clocks looks like a sound investment.

2.27 pm

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, it is a great privilege to congratulate, on behalf of the whole House, my noble friend Lady Wheatcroft on her excellent and delightful maiden speech, which she made with such humour and style. She has given us an insight into the qualities and experience that she brings to your Lordships' House. In testing times, her distinction and reputation in the front rank of journalism and her knowledge of the City and the financial sector will be invaluable. Her public service commitment as a trustee of the British Museum and the Royal Albert Hall could not be more appropriate for today's debate. We look forward to hearing from her often.

I also thank my noble friend Lord Younger for initiating this important debate and I very much look forward to the maiden speeches of my noble friends and other noble Lords. We have already heard two exceptional speeches. It is also a great pleasure to see the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson of Balmacara, in his place on the Front Bench for the first time. As a Buckinghamshire man, I am delighted to see another.

Tourism is a big business in this country. The United Kingdom is the sixth most visited country in the world, with people coming to experience our culture and heritage and to visit locations that inspire democracy, industry and the arts. London is the number one most visited city in the world and is rightly famous for its museums, theatres and galleries. Indeed, in 2009 this Palace had nearly 1 million visitors. However, in 2006 only 20 per cent of visitors left London and the major cities. Therefore, many tourists are missing out on the British countryside, its county towns and villages, and the rural tourism industry is losing out on potential income.

Your Lordships would expect me, as a board member of the Countryside Alliance, to say that we should be encouraging more people to visit our most precious natural asset, which is our magnificent countryside, but Britain is ranked only 24th in the world in terms of natural beauty, behind countries such as Finland and Japan, and 12 places behind Ireland. As I reflect on that, are not all too many of our arterial routes strewn with litter, which is a disgrace to our country? I doubt that I am alone in expressing great embarrassment over just how filthy many of our roadsides currently are.

There are many beautiful parts of the world, but do they have the range—I emphasise that word—of landscapes that our comparatively small islands have to offer? The Lake District, Exmoor, the Chilterns, the Cotswolds, the Highlands, the Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia and the Giant's Causeway—to name but a few—provide astonishingly beautiful landscapes. It is encouraging that VisitEngland has identified that, in 2008-09, rural attractions reported a strong increase in visits, which were up by 7 per cent on the previous year, and we must build on this. I welcome the proposals that the Prime Minister laid out in his speech in August last year with the aim of invigorating tourism in the UK. The royal wedding, Her Majesty's diamond jubilee and the Olympics and Paralympics will put the international spotlight firmly on London. There are great opportunities to promote visiting beyond the boundaries of the M25.

The good news is that the UK domestic tourism market has increased over the past few years. Last year, visitors from within the UK made 126 million overnight trips and spent £22 billion in the process—much of that in rural areas. In total, rural tourism in England and Wales generates at least £16 billion a year, which makes up a substantial part of the overall total of £73 billion. Tourism makes a significant contribution to the rural economy, supports village shops and services, jobs and businesses and is crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our countryside. The jobs that are supported by rural tourism—380,000 in England alone—encourage people to live, work and bring up their families in rural communities.

Turning from the general to the particular, I want to focus on one part of the country, West Somerset, where a quarter of all jobs are in tourism. This is due in part to the good relationship between the private and public sectors and to the fact that the national parks work well with local hostelries and activity enterprises. A further reason behind the area's success is the draw of country sports enthusiasts from here and abroad to participate in hunting, shooting and fishing in the counties of Devon and Somerset. These pastimes are not only part of Exmoor's heritage but, as the Countryside Alliance has pointed out, account for 90 per cent of winter tourism in the area. They maintain employment in otherwise challenging circumstances and provide vital income in the winter months. Indeed, many would not survive without this trade.

Rural tourism playing its fullest part in the international market is a huge economic opportunity. Currently, we have 3.5 per cent of the world market in

the international tourism sector. It is estimated that each half a percentage point increase would add £2.7 billion of spending to the economy and more than 50,000 jobs. Therefore, we should work hard to promote the UK in emerging economies such as India, China and Latin America. My noble friend Lady Wheatcroft's membership of the UK-India Round Table will, I have no doubt, be most helpful in that regard.

The noble Lord, Lord Lee, mentioned China. We must become a destination for more Chinese tourists. The UK has recently fallen from sixth to eleventh place in the World Economic Forum's travel and tourism competitive ratings. We are rated 14th out of 50 countries for the quality of our welcome. According to VisitBritain, foreigners view us as honest, funny, kind and efficient, but,

"in some cases they wish we offered a more exuberant welcome", so we have some challenges ahead.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has put aside £50 million to market Britain across the world, and the tourism industry has responded well to the challenge to match this with the same amount of private investment. These are exciting opportunities for us to grasp firmly. In the current economic climate, tourism is an area in which Britain could succeed. I hope that my noble friend the Minister will explore further the many areas in which Her Majesty's Government can assist in this partnership for success.

2.35 pm

Lord Palmer of Childs Hill: My Lords, I thank the noble Viscount, Lord Younger of Leckie, for initiating this debate. I also thank the many noble Lords and officers and staff of the House who have befriended me since my introduction and made my first weeks in this illustrious House far less unnerving than they might have been. I thank particularly my two sponsors, my noble friends Lord Dholakia and Lord Carlile, for all their help and encouragement.

Nevertheless, it is with some trepidation—your Lordships can hear this from all the maiden speakers today—that I stand to speak before you today for my maiden speech. Could it be that Oscar Wilde was wrong when he said that politicians address all subjects with an open mouth? Even more difficult is the requirement to be uncontroversial—particularly for me—but I will do my best to be both uncontroversial and to the point.

When I stood as a Liberal candidate in school elections way back in the dark ages—it was a long time ago—I had no idea that I would one day be addressing this august body. My family background is a cocktail of nationalities. My late mother was Polish, and in the context of today being national Holocaust Memorial Day, I remember her mother and sister, my grandmother and aunt, who stayed in Poland and were never heard of again at the end of the Second World War. Today, we remember all those, not only in that Holocaust but everywhere else, who were not so lucky as my mother and sadly perished in those dreadful times.

My father also came from far away—Newcastle. My Uncle Isaac was killed in service in the Middlesex Regiment in the First World War, while my father served in the British Army in the Second World War.

By profession, I am a chartered accountant and spent my professional life as a partner and senior partner in firms of London-based chartered accountants. As an adult with a young family—I thank my wife Suzanne and my children for their wonderful support—I wanted to play my part in making my London borough a good place to live and work. As a borough councillor for the best part of 25 years, both in government and in opposition, that has been my aim.

As a councillor, one of my concerns was that of promoting the London Borough of Barnet. However, my interest in urban tourism was generated by chance. I was invited by a senior politician to hear a speech that he would be making at the English Tourist Board. As I had at that time no practical interest in tourism, he had to persuade me that I would enjoy his speech and, incidentally, the copious food and drink that would follow. He was right. As I walked, somewhat erratically, down Lower Regent Street following the event, I started to think about what I described as urban tourism. I realised that my borough, Barnet, like many towns and cities, had much to offer visitors. Lots of famous personalities lived or worked there—for example, Amy Johnson—and there were many places of real interest, one being the exceptional Royal Air Force Museum at Colindale, which has fascinating displays including a hands-on section for children.

Then there is the green belt surrounding Barnet with its rural parks and open spaces. We have heard about rural England from other speakers. Consulting with Barnet's local studies historian and archivist, I ascertained that there were many notable people and places of pilgrimage in our borough. William Wilberforce—he of the abolition of slavery—prayed at St Paul's church, while his friend Sir Stamford Raffles has a tomb at St Mary's Hendon. For those interested in church monuments, there are monumental brasses to be rubbed, notably at Finchley and Hadley. I am very grateful to the right reverend Prelate for taking about the place that churches can play both in religion and in tourism. We are also in close proximity to the great estate of Kenwood, with its historic house and grounds.

I am sure that Barnet is not alone in having more to offer tourists than at first meets the eye. This situation probably applies to many towns and boroughs throughout Britain, which, if they look, will find sights and facilities to promote tourism. I was shocked when I was a council cabinet member I found that managers of local hotels had little idea of the wealth of interest in the local area. However, once apprised of the possibilities, they were interested in taking them up.

In these difficult times, more conferences will be held outside central London, and our urban conurbations need to develop positive facilities for these and to promote places of interest for the non-attending partners of delegates.

What about the bikes for hire in London? Surely there is scope for rides through the Royal Parks, or guided bicycle tours of London's historic centre. More

[LORD PALMER OF CHILDS HILL]

people are getting on their bikes, even without the prompt of the noble Lord, Lord Tebbit, and this should be encouraged as an environmentally sound way of exploring our country for citizens and visitors alike.

I have concentrated on London, but the same rationale can be applied to many places in Britain. For example, my children were at university in Manchester, which is another example of a large town with an industrial background where many visitors interested in industrial history, manufacturing and the growth of urban life will find sites of interest.

With the rise in the use of the internet and mobile phone apps, particularly among the young, promoting one's area on these media is essential for successful tourism. My plea is that tourism is not only for the headline-catching events, but these certainly have their place. We are starting a decade of major international sporting events hosted across Britain, with the Olympic Games. Our travel, hospitality and tourism industries have a wonderful opportunity to boost tourism, show the country's great attractions and increase and enhance Britain's popularity and reputation as a five-star tourist destination. We need to encourage everyone to enjoy seeing as much of our country as possible and to travel widely throughout our urban and rural landscapes, across the great diversity of interest and enjoyment that our country can provide.

Government can help. The noble Lord, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, referred to a speech on tourism last year by the Prime Minister, David Cameron. I shall quote from that, because there was not a lot of quote in what the noble Lord said. The Prime Minister said that,

"the current business rates system ... fails to support the development of tourism. If a local council does more to attract tourists to its area they know they'll be picking up costs but they'll get none of the additional business rate revenue. Central government sucks in 100 per cent of this revenue generated by all local economic growth. This is just mad".

We are known as a country with a temperate climate—and reference has been made to our weather in this debate. It is interesting, at least. Our countryside ranges from pleasant to magnificent, but we should not forget our towns and suburbs, both ancient and modern, with much to offer the tourist. We had a lot of statistics from the noble Viscount, but I shall quote just one. Cultural tourism is Britain's fifth largest industry, our third largest export earner and worth about £115 billion a year. This is good, but it could be made even better and more versatile, and I welcome this debate.

In conclusion, I thank you all for your kindness in this my first—some would say unusual—week in your Lordships' House, and I hope to contribute to the civilised debate, for which this House is famous, for many useful years to come.

2.45 pm

Lord Palmer: My Lords, I still find it a little strange no longer to be the only Lord Palmer in this House. I have never before received so many Christmas cards, but it gives me enormous pleasure to congratulate the noble Lord on his thought-provoking maiden speech, which was delivered with distinction and fluency. He

has long been a prominent member of his party and I am sure that we will all benefit from his interventions in the years to come. On behalf of the whole House, I congratulate him on a truly splendid performance.

I, too, congratulate the noble Viscount on introducing his first debate and for his comprehensive view of the United Kingdom's tourism industry. I concur with everything that he said. I also congratulate him on attracting a record number of maiden speakers, pro rata, in this debate, which only goes to show how strongly Members of this House feel about this subject. Back in 1995, I had the privilege to lead a debate on the arts and heritage, which then attracted a record number of maiden speakers, who included an Earl, a Viscount and a noble Lord from these Benches. Sadly, such an occasion is no longer possible.

I must declare an interest, because I open my home and gardens to the visiting public. As such, I am very dependent on a vibrant tourism industry. Sadly, our income from tourism has recently fallen drastically—20 years ago, I used to be relatively content with 12,000 visitors a year; last year we were lucky to attract a little more than 5,000. It does not take a financial genius to work out what a sizeable drop of income that represents. This affects not only our income but that of the local economy in the sparsely populated area of the Scottish borders, which during the summer and indeed the winter months—with shooting, for example—is so dependent on tourism. The noble Lord, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, made that very point, particularly with regard to the West Country.

In my small capacity as a tourist attraction operator, I employ five full-time people and a further 15 part time. I believe that due to our repeat business which we are fortunate to experience, we have a product worth selling, but we are up against all the odds, not least of all the price of petrol, the increase in VAT and fierce competition from overseas. If one looks at the travel pages in the daily press, in theory—I emphasise, in theory—one can go to Malta, for example, for £299 per person, all inclusive. I repeat, all inclusive. That includes flights, board, lodging and all drinks for seven nights. A first-class open rail ticket from King's Cross to Edinburgh now costs nearly £400. That is simply for one journey.

I know of one noble Lord who visited my home, among others in the Scottish borders, whose total bill for the week was well over £2,000. I confirmed this with him only last night. How can visitor attractions in this country possibly compete with what is on offer overseas?

I wish to concentrate on the grotesquely unfair tax—air passenger duty or APD. It is an utter myth that this is an environmental tax, given that private planes and cargo planes are exempt. The one group of people who really could afford APD are those with the luxury of owning a private plane or a part-share in one. Holland and Belgium have recently abandoned their equivalent, realising the damage that APD has done to their economies. Meanwhile, in the past six years, APD in this country has risen by a staggering 325 per cent. London is far more of an expensive destination than all our rival European cities, especially for those coming from China, India, Australasia and

Russia. Ireland has just announced that its levy will be cut from €10 to just €3. When you compare that with a levy of £85 for someone travelling in economy class to Ireland from the United Kingdom, it makes a complete mockery.

Not unnaturally, more and more travellers living in the regions are increasingly choosing to fly long haul via Amsterdam, Paris or Frankfurt rather than Heathrow, in order to avoid this tax. Her Majesty's Government have announced that they are looking at APD and I sincerely believe that all these points must be taken on board and action must be taken as soon as possible.

One of my pet hates about tourism in the United Kingdom is the lengthy queues at immigration desks on entering this country, especially early in the morning when only a small number of desks appear open and a vast number of passengers are arriving after a long and exhausting overnight flight. That is so unwelcoming and surely it is a problem that could be so easily rectified. I urge the Minister to take this on board. The noble Viscount and others mentioned the forthcoming Royal wedding and next year's Olympic Games. The results of the review of the APD must be in place well before the first of those two important events.

This country has so much to offer and this is such a wonderful opportunity. It must be grasped now—I emphasise now—before, indeed, it is too late.

2.51 pm

Lord Stoneham of Droxford: My Lords, it is an honour and a privilege to speak to the House for the first time. I would like to thank the House and especially its staff for the welcome and support that I have experienced during my introduction and induction. It has been very much appreciated. Coming in as a long-time supporter of reform of this House, the warmth of my welcome has made me recall the advice of my former mentor, friend and colleague Roy Jenkins—a most distinguished past Member of this House—who, echoing the words of Adlai Stevenson, always advised us to be cautious. He said, “Enjoy the House of Lords, but don't inhale”.

Like Roy Jenkins, I have been a long-standing European. I am a little sad that it was in my home village of Droxford in Hampshire, now associated with me in this House, that Churchill made his intemperate response to General de Gaulle that when it came to the point, he would always side with the USA against France. The fierce arguments two days before D-Day in June 1944 took place on a train on the sidings of Droxford station, now sadly closed. I like to think that the intemperate atmosphere that day was not helped by the tactless choice of Churchill to meet a French statesman in a railway carriage so soon after the French surrender at Compiègne. Anthony Eden and Ernest Bevin did their best to contradict the views of Churchill that day but Harold Macmillan sadly felt the consequences of this conversation 18 years later.

I have spent most of my business career in the newspaper industry, both in regional and national newspapers. For 10 years, I was based just over the downs from Droxford in Portsmouth. There I became firmly committed to the view that successful

businessmen should contribute more to society than they take out—a sentiment that I fear has weakened in recent years but needs much more emphasis in a period of austerity.

When I went to work in Portsmouth 21 years ago, it had unemployment of over 10 per cent. The naval dockyard was in severe decline. The community simply had to diversify from its overdependence on the Navy. Fortunately, Portsmouth had a vision of what needed to be done, and developing tourism lay at the heart of it. The Renaissance of Portsmouth Harbour partnership was formed, which I chaired. It involved the private, public and voluntary sectors to regenerate and restructure the whole Portsmouth harbour frontage into the world asset that it deserves to be. Funds came from private developers and were combined with lottery funding and other funds to link existing and new attractions on the harbour-side. Two million people have visited the Spinnaker Tower since it was built five years ago, and the city region now benefits from over £400 million in spending by 7.2 million visitors a year. As important as the new jobs and revenues, tourism has helped shape a new perception of Portsmouth so that it can attract new business and investment.

I like to think that the Portsmouth partnership will be seen as a forerunner of the local enterprise partnerships. They will have a major role to play in developing tourism. Portsmouth has joined the new Solent Partnership with its great rival Southampton and the Isle of Wight. There remain great opportunities for other regeneration work in the old dockyard. There is a new museum for the “Mary Rose” and the Royal Navy to come. Tourism will continue to be a strong source of jobs and economic growth. Portsmouth will not stand still. I am also glad that the Navy, despite its cutbacks, has found funds to keep HMS “Victory”, the flagship of the Second Sea Lord, in her prime.

Tourism is one of our biggest business sectors in the UK and has great economic potential for the country. However, we cannot be complacent and just rely on our innate heritage, culture and countryside. In a very competitive global market, tourism needs renewal and investment. It will be an important outlet of jobs over the coming decade. It is a fact that the largest proportion of our young people get their first experience of work in the tourism and hospitality sectors. In terms of skill enhancement, the experience of work and confidence-building among young people, tourism has an important role to play. The Government can help with initiatives for employment training and work experience for those finding it difficult to enter the labour market.

It is essential that the Government set a stable and encouraging environment for tourism to develop. At a time when funds will be short, though, we should be looking again at a costless initiative to boost the tourism industry. I support the view expressed today by my noble friend Lady Wheatcroft, who I worked with at the *Times*, that the Government, in their forthcoming review of tourism, should put the extension of British Summer Time back on the political agenda. That would directly benefit tourism in this country. I thank the House for listening to my views today.

2.58 pm

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, it is a great pleasure to be able to congratulate my noble friend Lord Stoneham on an excellent maiden speech. He brings to this House a great deal of talent and a huge amount of experience. He told us some of the things that he has done in Portsmouth, and we all congratulate him on them, but he has done all sorts of other things too. He might well have enjoyed his time in the Labour Party but it could not have been a bundle of fun to be treasurer during the 1979 election for the campaign for Labour victory. He moved from there, however—he obviously did not inhale the Labour Party enough to satisfy himself—and, in a way, he became a maternity nurse because he oversaw the beginning of the Alliance. More recently, he was on the Alliance's merger committee, so he has had a wealth of experience in politics. He has stood for Parliament four times, and the other place's loss is our gain because it is a delight to welcome him here. I am also pleased that one of his interests is housing because the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, and I have taken part in debates on that and welcome a new face in them. We look forward to hearing my noble friend a great deal more in future. I thank him for a very good speech.

I thank my noble friend Lord Younger of Leckie, a fellow Scot, whose father was my first Secretary of State when I was a Whip for Scotland many blue moons ago. There is no doubt that my noble friend's late father would be immensely proud of what his son is doing in the House and of his introducing the debate today.

I declare my interest. I run a heritage visitor attraction in the north of Scotland, am a trustee and have involvement with other visitor attractions. I also take an active part in ancestral tourism. When I discussed this debate with a friend yesterday, he said, "Goodness, tourism is going so well that I would not spend any money on it". At first blush, he might be right. As my noble friend Lord Younger said, the picture is good. Tourism is Britain's fifth largest industry, its third largest export turnout and worth about £115 billion a year. Overseas visitors contribute some £3 billion to the Treasury every year. Tourism supports over 200,000 small and medium-sized enterprises and, according to the Nation Brands Index, in terms of culture the UK is fourth out of 50.

In Scotland—I will, not surprisingly, speak mostly about Scotland—tourism accounted for £11.1 billion of GDP, which is over 10 per cent, and over a quarter of a million jobs, again over 10 per cent of the total. A disproportionate number of those jobs are in the Highlands. Recently, the *National Geographic Traveler* included the Scottish Highlands as one of its 20 best trips of 2011. We welcome that greatly. I look forward to more visitors to the Highlands but it must be remembered that those visitors will also go through London and probably Edinburgh—or one of the two. Those cities will benefit and we in the Highlands tend not to get much back from them. Recent reports predict growth throughout the United Kingdom including the north of Scotland, so perhaps when I discussed that with my friend yesterday he was right.

Yet it is clear from the debate that not everything is rosy in the garden. We need to protect and enhance the jewel that we have in tourism. The Government need to recognise what it contributes to the country. I was interested by what my noble friend Lord Lee said on that. Having been a Minister for Tourism, I know that it is not given the recognition that it deserves by government. We have no divine right to expect tourists to come here. We are losing our share of international tourism. In competitive terms, in 2009 the UK was down five places from where it was in 2008. It looks as if the goose that lays the golden eggs is being slowly strangled. There are warnings here for the national Government in Westminster and the regional Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

On the national Government, the noble Lord, Lord Palmer, mentioned inbound immigration costs. He will be horrified to know that the UK Border Agency aims for a 45-minute wait for those coming from outside Europe but fails to achieve this 30 per cent of the time. The cost of coming to the UK is horrific. It is ranked 133 out of 133 nations on price competitiveness. The ease of access of coming to the UK between 2006 and 2012, so far as airline seat capacity is concerned, has increased by only 2.9 per cent whereas the capacity of France is up 6.3 per cent while Germany has risen to 5 per cent. Those are not good trends. The red lights are flashing.

While on the cost of travel, I pick up again what the noble Lord, Lord Palmer, said on airport duty. Would the Minister spare time after this debate to look at the cost of booking a flight to Wick in July? She will find that the airport duty—tax and fees—alone is more than the entire cost of a flight, including taxes and fees, to either Milan or Malta on the same date. That is stupid. It is cutting our own throats and stops people wanting to come here.

As the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, said in his excellent speech, tourism is a devolved matter. In Scotland we are lucky to have an agency such as VisitScotland that has such a good brand to sell. I said I was interested in ancestral tourism. Last year in Scotland we had the Homecoming, which was a major attraction throughout Scotland. The prime event was the Gathering in Edinburgh, which was organised by the private sector. My noble friend Lady Wheatcroft is absolutely right to say that the private sector should drive such things. Although it is disappointing that it lost money, it is worth reflecting on the figures. In the end, when all the costs were in, about 20 per cent of the budget came from public funding but the return on public funding as a result of the Gathering was 20:1. It produced something like £10.4 million for the Scottish economy and £8.8 million for Edinburgh. The projected rate of investment return was 8:1 but, as I said, it was 20:1. The Scottish Government are planning another Homecoming in 2014, when I hope there will be another Gathering. We have the blueprint and have learnt some lessons but there needs to be much better co-ordination and help across all sectors, including the Government and all agencies. However, it must be run by the private sector because it is the private sector that brings ancestral tourism back to this country.

That working relationship needs to be addressed in another area, too. It was quite right that the tourist boards were abolished; they were bureaucratic and not doing their job. The destination marketing organisations are a much better way forward. They need to be mean and lean and private sector-driven, but they do need the support of local government and its agencies. Local government and the agencies often think that they can do things better than the private sector, when they should be working in partnership.

I mention one thing that has not been mentioned so far: signage on roads. We have a five-star tourist attraction called Caithness Horizons in Thurso. It has been open for two and a half years but there is still no agreement between TranServ and Travel Scotland about signing it on the main trunk road to Thurso. It is ludicrous. How can visitors to the country begin to realise what we have and come to appreciate it?

I have mentioned what the Government should be doing and what the agencies should be doing but the private sector also needs to get its act together. We are not working in as united a way as possible. There are huge challenges ahead. We are subject to vast international competition. Visitors are even more demanding than they have been in the past. Unless we produce the right quality of visitor attraction and service in the hotel they will not come again. That is, without doubt, a very clear message. We have problems with the quality of staff. Getting the right quality of staff and retaining them when you have such a short tourist season as we have in the north of Scotland is a major problem. The private sector needs help on that.

One of the reasons that *National Geographic Traveler* mentioned in its support for the Highlands as a destination was the countryside and the, “stunning quality of light on the moors”.

One of my major concerns is the plethora of windmills that have appeared on skylines, and which are edging the beautiful light that we have in the countryside into a flickering light that will put off every tourist who comes near the place.

I will close on one thing that I was not going to mention but has been mentioned—that is, daylight saving. I know that all your Lordships would expect me, coming from the far north of Scotland, to be against daylight saving. I have not come across anybody in Caithness who does not want the change. We realise that farming methods have changed considerably. It was quite right that 20 years ago daylight saving would have been a huge disbenefit to us. Now it would be a benefit and I hope it is one of the things that the Government will introduce.

3.09 pm

Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames: My Lords, as I rise to speak here for the first time, I am deeply conscious of the privilege and honour of joining your Lordships’ House. For me, as a lawyer, it is a particular privilege—and a daunting one—to be joining the substantial cohort of distinguished lawyers who sit on these Benches and across the whole House.

I start by thanking my two supporters. My noble friend Lord Goodhart is one of the most distinguished of those lawyers whom I mentioned and has been a

friend and mentor to me throughout my 30 years of involvement in politics. Indeed, it was his wife Celia, herself a well known and widely loved Liberal Democrat, who first signed me up as a member of the SDP in those heady days following the Limehouse declaration in early 1981. My junior supporter, my noble friend Lady Falkner of Margravine, has also been a very good friend to me and a source of advice, information and good ideas over a number of years. I am very grateful to them both.

I am also hugely grateful for the generosity of my welcome here across the House, both from my own party and from Peers of all parties and none. Before arriving here, I used to think that I had a good sense of direction—so good, in fact, that in common, I am told, with many of my gender I never needed to seek directions when lost. Here, however, I have been completely humbled by the layout of this Palace and, had it not been for the enormous help of the Doorkeepers and all the other staff, I would never have found my way anywhere at all. I thank all the amazing staff of this House for their constant help and kindness over the two weeks—two rather full weeks, I might add—since I arrived here.

As a barrister, I have practised in recent years mostly in the largely unrelated fields of commercial and family law, but for much of my career I have had a far wider general practice. I hope to put my experience at the Bar to good use in your Lordships’ House. Politically, I chaired the Liberal Democrat Lawyers Association for six years and served, also for six years, on the party’s federal policy committee. However, I come to this House with no previous parliamentary experience and was never a Member of the other place. That was not for want of trying, as in the 1980s I stood twice as a candidate for the House of Commons, first in Weston-super-Mare and then in Falmouth and Camborne. I also stood as a candidate for the European Parliament for Cornwall and Plymouth.

It was in connection with Cornwall in particular that I became interested in both the opportunities and the challenges offered by tourism, which was then and is now even more so Cornwall’s principal industry. It is for that reason that I have chosen to speak in this debate. I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Younger of Leckie for bringing it to this House. For Cornwall, the challenge has been and remains to attract high-quality tourism that is not unduly dependent on the weather and that extends over a season beyond the traditional tourist summer months—and to do so in a sustainable way, where the demands of high tourist numbers do not damage the quality of the very environment that makes Cornwall unique.

Cornwall is of course blessed with a natural landscape of remarkable beauty, but it has also had great successes achieved by the imagination of a large number of people. They include, to name but a few, the development of the Eden Project, the Lost Gardens of Heligan and a great many wonderful smaller private gardens, and the Tate at St Ives and the revival of interest in the Newlyn school of painting. However, one step that would, in my view, further assist Cornwall in particular and the tourist industry generally in Britain—this has been mentioned in a swelling chorus in this debate by the noble Viscount, in his opening speech, and by my

[LORD MARKS OF HENLEY-ON-THAMES]

noble friends Lord Lee of Trafford, Lady Wheatcroft, Lord Stoneham and Lord Caithness—would be for the Government to give their backing to the Daylight Saving Bill. The one-hour move proposed would have profound economic and environmental benefits at virtually no financial cost.

I would also like to say a word or two about the Olympics and Paralympics in the context of tourism. My wife—I thank her and my family for their wonderful help and support—is Greek. We visit Athens regularly. In 2004, we attended a large number of events at the Athens Olympics. I think that there are lessons that we can learn. On the positive side, the organisers had recruited a veritable army of young people, who were there to give advice and help to visitors to the Games not only at the stadia but at metro, bus and tram stations across the city. For those young people, as well as for those whom they helped, this made a profound difference. There are no doubt many whose experience of the Games has built up their confidence and helped them in later life at a difficult time for Greece.

On the negative side, however, while the transport infrastructure built for the Games in Athens has survived and has given a substantial boost to the city's economy, the wonderful sports venues now lie forlorn and derelict, covered in graffiti and strewn with rubbish, maintained, or rather undermaintained, at a public cost of tens of millions of euros annually. It is vital that, following the 2012 Olympics, we ensure that the promise of a long-term legacy that we made in our bid for the Games is kept, so I hope that when the Olympic Park Legacy Company meets again to consider the rival bids for the Olympic stadium early next month it will look to enhance the future of athletics in this country and to take advantage of the regeneration in east London that the Olympics will bring about. That will be good both for the future of sport and for the future of tourism in Britain.

Finally, on the importance of sport to tourism, I mention my own home town, Henley-on-Thames, where I was brought up and where I live now. It has, since 1839, and without any commercial sponsorship or outside subsidy, hosted the Henley Royal Regatta, probably the world's greatest rowing event, which attracts teams and their supporters every year and in increasing numbers from all over the world, to the immeasurable benefit of the local economy of the town and of the wider area. It is a great example of what tourism already does for our economy locally and nationally, but there is a great deal more that we could do to foster and encourage the tourist industry to achieve its full potential. I hope that this debate plays some part in that endeavour and I am grateful for the part that I have been able to play in it.

3.18 pm

Lord Selsdon: My Lords, after nearly 48 years in this House, I wonder why I feel rather nervous today. I think that it is something to do with the word “maiden” or the fact that there are six maiden speakers in a small debate. When you come to this place, often you have many friends who try to advise you. One of these was the ninth Baron Hawke, who came from a great cricketing

family and was very kind to me. He was a Lord in Waiting and told me where to sit. To begin with, I did not know where to sit; I sat on the Barons' Bench, which is the Back Bench over there, because that is what it said in the book. I did not know that when the Government changed you sat on the opposite side of the Chamber. I was only 25. I had no concept that the Liberals would so change sides. This idea of maidens made me think, because when you hear six really good maiden speeches you realise that adding to this House provides quality from time to time. Lord Hawke had six daughters and then, being descended from a great cricketing family, he had a seventh. When asked how he felt, he said, “At least I've got a maiden over”. Sandwiched between these maiden speakers, I feel rather like some sort of worn-out grilse with two fresh run salmon on either side.

I should declare an interest in that I have spent much of my life as a business tourist. I like to go to places that I want to go to. I have spoken before on the subject of tourism. I declare first and foremost that I worked for a while with the Midland Bank group. We owned Thomas Cook, the first tour operator. I hate “ism” words. I do not like tourism, fundamentalism or any form of “ism”. The tour was the original thing that Thomas Cook did. He set up a train that went from Leicester to Loughborough. Then another member of the family, Miss Jemima, set up the river boats on the Nile.

I will concentrate today on infrastructure. I went out to see why Thomas Cook was not doing very well on the Nile. I came back to my hotel one night and felt really ill. I realised that I had that classic disease known as gippy tummy, a cousin of Delhi belly. I wondered what the problem was and was told that it was the sewers. I went off and asked if we could rebuild the sewers. The noble Lord, Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames, will understand this, because he is a specialist in the doubtful underground tunnelling machinery that I have used in my life. I came back and suggested that we should redo the sewers of Cairo. Before long, I was rather proud to tell my colleagues that I had won a contract to rebuild the sewers, because tourism was fading and it was disease that was killing it. Then in the *Times*—this was nothing to do with my noble friend Lady Wheatcroft, whom I had not met at the time—I saw the headline, “UK Cashes in on His Lordship's Stomach”. I was caught. What happened was that if you get the infrastructure right, suddenly things change. I use Egypt as a simple example. Its tourism industry is booming because there is no disease.

One of our problems in the United Kingdom may well be the lack of necessary infrastructure. I declare another interest. For six years I chaired the Greater London and South East Council for Sport and Recreation, responsible for planning sport and recreation in Greater London, Surrey, Sussex and Kent, so help me God. We had a team of 152. The Government thought that the more people one brought together to do things, the better. We had quite a lot of money to spend. However, I realised that we had something like 85 active sports. Now, if you want the British to do something, the best thing that you can do is to get them to enjoy it. We did not worry about trying to stop ILEA closing down playing fields for children. We set out to create fun. We

thought that it might be a good idea to create enjoyment on the Thames. To us, it seemed a place that you could attract people to. It was slightly polluted. Noble Lords may remember Tufton Beamish, the great Member of the other place, who offered a 100 guinea prize for the first person to catch a salmon in the Thames. All of us tried. We bought salmon in shops and tied them to a bit of string to see if we could win the prize. Now, suddenly, the Thames is beginning to clean up. Docklands was a dead place. Those of us who went down to help to regenerate Docklands would go past Limehouse Cut every day. We knew that little planning shop in Limehouse, where suddenly politics was going to change.

I turn now to the infrastructure of tourism and the points that have been made so far. In order to attract people to the United Kingdom, we have to make it easy and economic to get here. However, we must not look solely at tourism, because we are looking to attract people to invest and build businesses here. I remember working with Peter Walker and the Welsh Development Agency. We created a wonderful network of new technology that went all the way down to Hereford, the Wye valley and beyond. It was the same with Silicon Glen in Glasgow and Scotland.

Attracting people here is important. It is an attractive place to be. When we were trying to get the Japanese firm Nissan to come here, the most important thing was whether they could be members of a golf club. We even put in a proposal for the creation of a new golf club. If one wants to attract tourists, one should think about the facilities and the infrastructure.

It is pretty pathetic that we had to shut our airports, that we could not keep them open this winter and that we were putting people off coming here. It is also disturbing that, as has been pointed out, the costs of coming to the United Kingdom from parts far away are so high. We have forgotten that there is in this world a kind of heritage. Every Commonwealth country has a heritage relationship with us. We know that when the Australians come they flood into Earls Court, kangaroo country. Others will go to different parts of England. It is those relationships that we need to build on, to make this place an attractive place to come to, a place where people want to work. We can look at the tourism—if we could use that word without the “ism”, I would prefer it—of teaching people the language; we could look at schools, games and sports. There is the boom that may take place as we look towards not only the Olympics but Her Majesty’s Jubilee year. Few of us will forget the time of the last Jubilee, when the whole of the Mall was crowded with the most amazingly mixed-culture group of people that you have ever seen, or the spirit of good will that was in the air.

I have envied the noble Lord, Lord Marks, for a long time. I had to take professional risks in the construction industry when we did not have the benefit of his advice. As he knows, he is in one of the oldest buildings in the world, which may well not conform to some of the high standards that he has been used to in his professional career. I regret that we have lost the Law Lords. We had 107 people to whom we could turn for free advice, but the addition of the noble Lord,

Lord Marks, leads me to believe that, as money may not change hands in your Lordships’ House, he will be freely available to be consulted by your Lordships on everything that we can think of. I am grateful to him for what he said today. I am really impressed by my noble friend, whose father I knew well, for having assembled such a remarkable team.

3.26 pm

Lord Risby: My Lords, I add my appreciation, as have so many who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon, for the real kindness and friendliness which has been shown to me. It is deeply appreciated and sincerely expressed. I also express my appreciation for the helpfulness and encouragement of the staff of the House of Lords. I congratulate my noble friend Lord Younger on introducing this debate in such a comprehensive way and putting it into such a good context.

I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation of my two supporters: first, my noble and learned friend Lord Mayhew of Twysden, whose work in Northern Ireland was hugely successful and greatly beneficial, as I saw for myself, and characterised by his immense modesty; and, secondly, my noble friend Lord Astor of Hever, whose good sense, wisdom and judgment I heard on many occasions in many meetings over the years.

In 1997, I became a shadow Minister for culture, media and sport, and enjoyed the tourism brief. I am pleased to say that today there is a dedicated tourism Minister. In those days of a somewhat passionate honeymoon for the incoming Government, it was not particularly easy to be an opposition spokesman, but it gave me a wonderful opportunity to travel to many parts of the country to meet people engaged in the tourism industry. I visited Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, where I had the opportunity to stay with the local Member of Parliament—a Liberal Democrat. At the time, one or two eyebrows were raised by local Conservatives at that act of minor political ecumenism, but I like to think that it was an act of prescience, even if it took 12 years to come to proper fruition.

Of course, we cannot account for our weather. It is the eccentric and not predictable. People will travel abroad in their droves to go to sunnier climes where the weather is more predictable. However, the point about our tourist offer is that we have an astonishing variety of places to visit and activities in which to share.

There is something of the Heineken effect with the tourism industry, in that it spreads to all parts of the United Kingdom, but I want to talk about London for a moment. We have an incomparable cultural life in this city with our opera, ballet, music and galleries and, perhaps above all, our theatre, which really is the jewel in the crown. Year after year and decade after decade, we have playwrights, producers, directors, actors and actresses of the highest possible quality, and they thrill us with their performances. Of course, we are blessed to have the English language, which draws many people to this city. As one goes down the Thames, it is wonderful to see the juxtaposition of an ancient building such as the Tower of London set against the

[LORD RISBY]

Gherkin. We are comfortable with all the architectural styles that mark our long and extraordinary history. Within 100 yards of where I live in central London, there are blue plaques in memory of Laura Ashley, Jomo Kenyatta and Aubrey Beardsley. They are an unlikely trio but that is London and that is its massive tourist appeal.

There has been a lot of discussion about the branding of tourism. I think that the Prime Minister got it right when he talked there being about a spectrum from Glyndebourne to Glastonbury. I know something about rock concerts and music festivals because my daughter would disappear for days on end and be totally incommunicado at such events. However, they are certainly a great draw for young people, particularly from China and south-east Asia. We also outclass other places in our exhibitions of fashion and design. Modernity and creativity are very much part of our national offering.

We ourselves are in an iconic building. Big Ben is something of a national symbol, and opposite is the London Eye—again, a perfect example of the juxtapositions that I am talking about. Of course, we are served very well in this country because there is nothing in the world comparable with the National Trust, English Heritage and the Historic Houses Association. What is so marvellous is that the people of this country really cherish the built architectural heritage and want to share it with others.

We have heard about some of the events that lie before us in tourist terms: the royal wedding, the Diamond Jubilee, the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games. Following their hosting of the Olympics, Barcelona and Sydney experienced an enormous increase in visitor numbers. I very much welcome the £100 million overseas marketing fund, which aims to deliver an additional 1 million visitors and £2 billion in extra revenues. Tourism contributes 8.7 per cent of our GDP, and that will undoubtedly be boosted by those events.

I live in a part of England which does not have hosts of golden daffodils by lakes—we do not have very much water in Suffolk. We have not mountains or soaring cliffs but a gentle landscape. However, we do have the music by people such as Benjamin Britten and the paintings of Constable which were inspired by that landscape. For 18 years, I represented a part of Suffolk in another place. I lived just outside a village called Risby, which was the epicentre of the area, and I saw the importance of the local attractions, whether it was the racecourse at Newmarket, Thetford Forest or the abbey at Bury St Edmunds. As our regional structures of governance are being changed, it is very important that the focus on the local market, and making people aware of that local market, is maintained. Today, we have country houses offering health hydros and wonderful restaurants. The standard of our food has increased enormously and, of course, the multi-ethnic nature of our population means that we have a huge variety on offer.

There has been a lively debate about the structures of tourism in this country, with VisitBritain promoting our country abroad. Of course, the economics are

good and bad: we have a substantial trade imbalance for the reasons that I have talked about. Nevertheless it is the fifth largest industry in this country and employs 1.5 million people. What is really significant is that it cannot be out-sourced or offshored. It is ours. What we are seeing is a better level of co-operation between government, tourists boards and the private sector. The real importance of tourism is understood for all its difficulties and challenges.

I conclude by saying that what we offer is unique. It is vital that more people know about it. It is in our national economic interest that that should be the case. It is true that perhaps journalists, real estate agents and politicians may rank low in the esteem of the public. It was perhaps ever thus, but it may be worse than ever now. For myself, I consider it to be a great honour to be here and to be able to continue to play some small part in the public life of our wonderful country.

3.35 pm

Baroness Valentine: I congratulate the noble Viscount, Lord Younger, on securing this important debate. I also congratulate all those who have given their maiden speeches today, which have variously been insightful and humorous. In passing, I point out that London's innovative bike scheme, to which the noble Lord, Lord Palmer of Childs Hill, referred, has been provided by a fellow maiden speaker, the noble Baroness, Lady Wheatcroft, through her position on the board of Barclays.

I also extend a personal welcome to the noble Lord, Lord Stoneham, whom I have known and respected for many years. In particular, I extend a welcome to the noble Lord, Lord Risby, whose maiden contribution has demonstrated his grasp of the importance of tourism and culture to the UK. I note that he was born in South Africa, which, taken with his chairmanship of the British Ukrainian Society and involvement in the British Syrian Society, will provide a valuable international perspective to your Lordships' debates. His long experience in the other place will add further insight to your Lordships' scrutiny of legislation.

I declare that I am chief executive of London First, which is a not-for-profit business membership organisation that includes QEII, ExCeL, Tottenham Hotspur, AEG and Westfield among its many tourism-relevant members. Think London—London's inward investment agency—is also a separately managed subsidiary of London First. I have much to declare, but also, I hope, some insight to share.

I join the choir of honourable members singing the praises of our cherished heritage and outstanding arts and culture sectors. Annual tourism revenue is more than £100 billion, with some 2.5 million jobs in hospitality alone. The sector contributes more than £34 billion in gross tax revenue. On this scale, tourism can make a significant contribution to desperately sought economic growth. What is more, with our currently competitive exchange rate and with a bit of investment, it can make that contribution now.

The UK offers a tremendous package—Bath's Georgian delights, Shakespeare's Stratford, Edinburgh's Royal Mile, and the Brecon Beacons' natural splendour—

but London is the gateway to the UK. Three-quarters of overseas visitors arrive via the capital and around half of all visitors stay overnight in London. Hotels and restaurants are the sixth largest employer in the capital. Business leaders seek a cultural weekend before a Monday meeting and leisure travellers explore the West End.

As for the promotion of London, the deckchairs are moving. The mayor is bringing together Visit London, Think London and potentially Study London into a new, merged promotional agency. I look forward to that agency building on the Think London staff team's business ethos, which has ensured that London has remained the top destination for inward investment in Europe for many years. However, I regret that the funding for this agency was temporarily mislaid before Christmas. That seems extraordinary at a time when we are building up to the Olympics and suggests that somebody somewhere is not taking the role of promotion and tourism seriously, despite its—and London's—manifest contribution to economic growth and, indeed, the sector's tax contribution.

The new agency has an opportunity to address one of London's shortcomings. Business tourism already makes a contribution of over £24 billion each year to Britain's economy and accounts for about one in five overseas visitors, but it is unacceptable that London languishes at 16th place in the International Congress and Convention Association rankings. We need to co-ordinate, celebrate and sell London as a world business destination. Decades of debate about the merits of an international convention centre have been overtaken by events—if noble Lords will excuse the pun—as ExCeL now has 100,000 square metres of event space and is a world-class venue. However, the future of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre remains in question. With its unique Westminster location and some imaginative thinking from government, the QEII conference centre could also play its part in London's broad visitor offer.

The Olympics are an obvious opportunity to champion London and the UK to the world. Summer 2012 represents merely the tip of the iceberg. I would not dare opine on the merits of football versus athletics as a future use for the stadium. My plea to the Olympic Park Legacy Company is to dare to dream of a new visitor destination in east London—including the Olympic park itself and the area south to the O2, east to ExCeL and London City Airport and west to Canary Wharf—to create something fabulous for visitors, businesses and residents alike. The Mittal Orbit tower will be iconic, Westfield Stratford will be Europe's largest urban shopping centre and there will even be a river crossing—which the Mayor quips will be a tribute to the Business Secretary—by cable car. Most vital is the stadium's role in securing the overall vision of a dynamic east London. Alongside the iconic, we need the prosaic—business investment and jobs for local people.

Finally, may I nudge the Minister on two issues? First, as other noble Lords have suggested, will she consider making tourist visas less restrictive, time-consuming and expensive? Of the 2 million increasingly spendthrift Chinese visitors to Europe each year, only 5 per cent visit London. Taiwanese visitor numbers

soared by 40 per cent when similar restrictions were relaxed. The second, which has also been mentioned, is the queues at Heathrow, on which we must do more. I hope that UK Border Agency staff at Heathrow terminal 4 have learned to sing, dance or at least smile; how else can they welcome and entertain arrivals when one in five non-EU passengers waited for longer than the 45 minute immigration queuing target in the first two weeks of September 2010?

I conclude by wishing all power to the Tourism Minister's elbow. She has a superministry wrapped up in a microministry—a big unpolished diamond that just needs a bit of burnishing to demonstrate its true value. For growth, balance of trade and jobs, tourism is the gift that keeps on giving.

3.41 pm

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara: My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Viscount, Lord Younger of Leckie, for securing this debate and for introducing it in such an interesting and informative way. He was able to draw out key points about the importance of tourism to our economy and illustrated them with some detailed factual information. A lot of the points that many other noble Lords picked up in their speeches make it clear that this is a vital part of our economy. He also pointed out the risks if we do not improve our offer. I cannot really agree with him about the clocks, although I know that that is not a very popular view, given that so many people have suggested that we should revisit this issue, because I come from Scotland, I lived through the earlier experiments and I did not like them. I encourage everyone to join the new campaign to bring back high tea, which is clearly the answer to a lot of our problems. The noble Viscount and I are on opposite sides of the debate today although, in truth, we are not really very far apart in what we say. We share other interests in Scotland and in Buckinghamshire and agree about the need to preserve the Chilterns, which I regard as a beautiful area of the country that currently has much to offer foreign and domestic tourists.

It speaks volumes for the topic selected by the noble Viscount for our short debate today that it has attracted a very high number of speakers, including an amazing six maiden speeches, and has prompted the addition of half an hour to the debate, something that I have not seen since I joined the House. I join other noble Lords in congratulating those who have made excellent maiden speeches today. Having only recently given my own maiden speech, I know all too well the heady mixture of exhilaration and sheer terror that accompanies that event. However, as the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, said, it is a necessary part of the process. Indeed, once their maiden speech has been completed, noble Lords have access to all the important activities in the House in which they will play their part.

I enjoyed the use that the noble Baroness, Lady Wheatcroft, made of her journalistic background to inform the debate. Her experience of working in a pub will obviously play on some of the points made about employment and other things. The noble Lord, Lord Palmer of Childs Hill, opened our eyes to urban tourism, of which I had not heard. It is certainly

[LORD STEVENSON OF BALMACARA]

interesting and, as he said, once one begins to dig into areas that might on the surface seem a little unlikely, they reveal riches of which we should all take advantage.

The noble Lord, Lord Stoneham, warned us not to inhale, but he also gave us important information about the new LEPs and their contribution to tourism. The noble Lord, Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames, drew on his experience in Henley and Cornwall to bring out points about tourism. He made a valuable point about the dangers that will accompany the expenditure and support of the Olympic Games if the site is not maintained and carried forward. Those words were wisely made. The noble Lord, Lord Risby, told us—I think it was tongue in cheek, but we may never know—that as a result of a visit to the Isles of Scilly he might claim credit for starting the coalition, so we know who to blame.

In no sense do I want to diminish the debate for other noble Lords, but there were so many detailed points that I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not go through them one by one, but I will refer to them as I make the remainder of my remarks. The test of whether any debate in the Lords is a success is that, having read it, you feel that you have been informed and are up to date on every point that should bear on the issue in question. Today, we have amply exemplified that.

This has been a high-level debate with practitioners and two former Ministers, many of whom have direct experience of operating visitor attractions. It was good natured, good humoured, informative and competitive. I now have a long list of places that I really have to visit all around the United Kingdom, which have been compellingly argued for by noble Lords who have spoken. The debate was also celebratory of the best of Britain, which is what it should be.

Many noble Lords set out the key facts affecting the current economic contribution of tourism to the UK economy. I will not repeat them, but they are impressive. I should like to make two points about the way in which they have been brought out. First, on direct tourism, it is very interesting to reflect that the proportion of jobs in tourism varies across the United Kingdom. We find a far higher proportion of tourism-related jobs in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the periphery of England than we do in the centre.

Looking at the wider contribution that tourism makes to our economy, which many people have said is probably 8.9 per cent or 9 per cent of GDP, it is interesting that most of that seems to happen primarily, and has most effect, in rural areas. It employs a large number of part-time staff. Sometimes it is very difficult to find part-time work, which is often female dominated. It is often difficult for females to find jobs outside the city centres. It is also important that we should recognise that it encourages entrepreneurship through some 200,000 SMEs, although most of them have a very small turnover.

It is clearly an important industry with interesting characteristics. It has been described as invisible, which I hope will change now that the department has a Tourism Minister who clearly has the support of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. However,

as several noble Lords have said, our tourism on offer suffers from the perception that it is not very well co-ordinated, is possibly not good value for money, has a variable quality—and it does not offer enough high teas, and is not responsive to our clients.

Because international tourism is a very competitive business these days, we are not doing so well in overseas markets, particularly in Asia. European competitors seem to do much better, and we must get to the bottom of why that is. However, as I have said before and as many noble Lords have said, we have a great deal to offer. We should not be shy in that and should not pretend that we have any difficulty in what we offer to people when they come.

However, there are barriers and problems. The industry is fragmented and there might be some significant market failures in information flows, marketing spend and co-ordination. There is a honey-pot effect in that 20 per cent of attractions appear to receive about 80 per cent of visits. I think that that might have been one of the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Palmer, whose wonderful house I have visited and who said that he had seen a decline in numbers over time. However, other visitor attractions seem to be doing well. Tourism is an industry with low wages, particularly because of part-time jobs. It certainly has poor training, partly because of short-termism, partly because there are no major players and partly because of poor industrial co-ordination.

As has been mentioned, there have been substantial grant support cuts amounting to 15 per cent over four years in the arts and heritage sectors, which of course drive tourism. There are sharp cuts in funding for VisitBritain and VisitEngland; I think the figure is 34 per cent by 2014-15. As the noble Lord, Lord Lee of Trafford, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Hereford, said, the RDAs are being abolished, although there will be a regional growth fund worth £1.4 billion, which does have space for tourism and which the new local enterprise partnerships have to bid for.

In answer to a Question last year in this House, we were told that the Government estimated that the total spend on marketing in the tourism sector, both public and private, was around £240 million, although I expect it will be a lot less this year. Of course, this is an industry that has what is called the free rider effect. You cannot really expect so many local small businesses to do what is best funded and led by national or regional bodies.

There are opportunities. We have heard about the royal wedding, the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games as part of the decade of sport, and they must offer a ray of hope. As a British tourism study says, all these events provide a global opportunity to invite the world to visit Britain, and the Olympic Games alone have a potential tourism benefit of around £2.1 billion between now and 2017. Clearly, all of us want to ensure that that is realised.

Currently, the Government say that they are formulating their tourism policy. When she responds, perhaps the Minister will give us at least a trailer about what is in store. Let me end by posing her some questions about that in the hope that they might draw her out. Can she share with us when we are likely to see the tourism strategy? I read in the Prime Minister's

speech in August last year that it would be presented in October, but we have not seen it yet. Can she let us know what progress is being made in generating the fund for marketing and PR, a joint fund between the Government and the industry? Can she tell us whether any of the local enterprise partnerships have made significant bids for tourism projects to the regional growth fund? I gather that the closing date was 21 January, so perhaps we will be told about that. Has her department looked at VAT in the tourism sector and whether it will have an impact on the targets that have been set for the industry? Can she let us know a bit about the pressing need for fast internet access, which was referred to in a number of speeches? It is obviously necessary in rural areas if businesses are to get on to the internet and market their wares, but how will they do that without the infrastructure? Lastly, can she confirm that the necessary funding and organisational structures will be in place to ensure that the expected £2.1 billion of tourism benefits actually arise from the Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games?

To finish, VisitBritain said in its April report that:

“With right support tourism can be a growth industry for Britain”.

It sounds like a good idea, and if they are talking about £188 billion by 2020 and 250,000 new jobs, surely we want a share of that. It occurs to me that if there has to be a plan B for the economy, maybe the Minister and her department should make the case to the Chancellor that a slice of the £3 billion in tax receipts should be returned to her department as an investment fund that could then be deployed to support the tourism sector, something I am sure we would all support.

3.52 pm

Baroness Garden of Frognal: My Lords, I begin by thanking my noble friend Lord Younger for bringing this issue before the House. He spoke eloquently and gave a comprehensive overview of the value of tourism to the UK economy, its many possibilities and the challenges. I also take the opportunity to welcome the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, to his new role. I am grateful to all noble Lords who have spoken, and in particular add my congratulations to the six new Members who have made outstanding maiden speeches which have added to the quality of this debate and ensured that we will look forward to their future contributions in your Lordships' House.

We have heard today about the real contribution that tourism makes to our national and local economies. It can be an underestimated industry, but not for this Government; for us it is a priority. We heard the concerns from my noble friends Lord Lee, Lord Caithness and Lord Risby that it may not be given due regard, but the appointment of a designated tourism Minister is one of the aspects which shows our seriousness. Further, in his third month in office, the Prime Minister gave a keynote speech on tourism and spoke again in its support at the launch of the Government's major new marketing campaign for tourism, to which the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, referred.

Tourism is our third highest export earner. It generates around £90 billion of direct business for the economy and more than £115 billion in indirect business, as well

as being one of our largest employers. Of the 200,000 plus businesses, many are small and medium-sized, providing more than 1.5 million jobs and 5 per cent of all employment. Tourism is therefore vital. It is fundamental to the rebuilding and rebalancing of our economy, to generating employment and to inspiring enterprise. It provides opportunities to drive growth and regeneration in all parts of the country, in our rural areas as well as in our major cities.

However, tourism has the capacity to achieve more and grow more, and the Government will help it to do so. It has been projected that tourism could generate 150,000 new jobs and an extra £34.5 billion for the economy by 2020 alone. We need to make sure that that potential becomes reality.

Let us just think of what this country has to offer—we have heard so many aspects today. We have breathtaking scenery—we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner, about the importance of rural tourism and from the noble Lord, Lord Marks, about Cornwall and Henley. The noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, spoke about the glories of the urban scene, which I shall mention again shortly. We offer a range of hospitality, from bed-and-breakfast to internationally renowned hotels. We have great regional, national and international food and drink, and incomparable history and heritage—we heard from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Hereford about the magnificent churches and cathedrals in our country, with which go the wonderful musical and other traditions associated with the church. We can boast culture, sport and forthcoming major events, including, as has been indicated, the royal wedding, Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, the London Olympic Games and the Cultural Olympiad. The noble Lord, Lord Risby, mentioned the glories of our theatres and our buildings, and the treasures of the National Trust.

However, we need a new approach to maximise the industry's potential, to move Britain up the rankings as an international destination and to provide a real boost for domestic tourism. The Government aim to help the industry in three ways: by creating a sustained legacy from the 2012 Olympics and other major events that the UK is due to host over the next few years—we heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, and others of the importance of that Olympic legacy; by supporting and promoting domestic tourism and therefore boosting domestic visitor expenditure; and by helping to raise the sector's productivity and performance so that UK tourism can compete more effectively in an increasingly crowded international market. I shall say a little more about that later.

Over the next four years, the Government will invest nearly £130 million in VisitBritain and VisitEngland. The very necessary public sector savings that we are making must apply to tourism funding as well as to other areas, but we aim to protect our priority programmes and focus the cuts on administration. We recognise that it is vital that government and industry work more closely together to develop a robust and rational investment model for tourism. As has already been mentioned, we have challenged British business to come together with government to create the best-ever overseas tourism marketing campaign for Britain. I am pleased to say that a number of major companies

[BARONESS GARDEN OF FROGNAL]

have already pledged their support to help match the £50 million of public money that the Government have committed specifically for this campaign through VisitBritain. I say in response to the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, that we are well advanced towards meeting the £100 million target for the marketing fund. It was encouraging to hear from the noble Baroness, Lady Wheatcroft, the noble Lord, Lord Stoneham, and others of the importance of the private sector to those money-raising campaigns. Arts & Business announced today that, in 2009-10, the culture sector received private sector donations of £658 million, of which £359 million was individual giving. That gives an indication of the support that is coming from private investors, whether as individuals or business.

Through this campaign, we are aiming to deliver 1 million additional overseas visitors to the UK in each of the next four years and £2 billion in extra visitor spend. We can and will create a real legacy for tourism—more visitors, more income, more jobs. We want to attract a larger number of international visitors and we need to do more to encourage UK residents to spend more of their leisure time in this country. I was interested to hear my noble friend Lord Palmer of Childs Hill talk of urban tourism. If he will forgive me, I recall a wonderful sketch many years ago by Peter Sellers entitled “Balham, Gateway to the South”. Although it was a spoof, there were grains of truth in its drawing attention to lesser-known attractions in our urban and suburban districts. My noble friend has made a much better fist of promoting Barnet as gateway to the north. As he said, it has a very wide range of history, buildings, culture, sports and parks, as have all the areas of London and further in the regions, to attract local residents as well as people from further afield.

The Government are also addressing the volume and complexity of regulation and the need to encourage tourist businesses through fiscal incentives by tackling that regulation and looking to simplify visa procedures. A number of contributions from your Lordships addressed that theme. We are currently looking at the customer experience at and through airports, and how that might be improved. It is evident from the contributions today that there is certainly room for improvement as part of an evolving strategy.

We have also been looking at visa procedures to try to simplify them and to see how far there is a deterrent effect in the complexity and the cost of having to apply in English, whereas other countries will often accept applications in other languages. Of course, we have to balance that with the elements of the security that our visa system gives us. The benefits, initiatives and marketing campaigns will be felt across all parts of the country, not just in London and other major cities but applied to our rural areas as well.

I turn to particular issues that arose. Noble Lords mentioned that we were not doing very well with India and China. We have recent news that applications for visitor visas from Chinese tourists rose by 40 per cent in the first six months of 2010, compared to last year, and more than 100,000 visa applications were received between January and July 2010—more than 50 per cent more than in the same period last year and way

above what was expected. The noble Lords, Lord Wigley, Lord Lee and Lord Gardiner, and the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, all referred to the importance of extending our visitor attractions to the emerging economies and the great nations such as China and India to ensure that the visitors see the UK as a prime tourist location.

The question of daylight saving cropped up. The noble Viscount, Lord Younger, introduced it but then the noble Baroness, Lady Wheatcroft, the noble Lord, Lord Stoneham, the noble Earl, Lord Caithness, and the noble Lord, Lord Marks, have all mentioned the issue. Last week there was a half-hour television programme on this. Having been in this House morning, noon and night, I have not had the opportunity to see television for a while, but I have been told that it is still going on out there and that there was a programme on daylight saving that raised the profile of this issue.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that it would be inappropriate to consider making changes in daylight saving unless there was consensus among the four nations of the United Kingdom. We are all agreed that the issue deserves more discussion. My right honourable friend the Minister for Employment Relations made the offer during the Private Member's Bill currently going through the other place to publish a review of the evidence and to start a dialogue with the devolved Administrations, because there appears to be a growing body of opinion about daylight saving.

The noble Lord, Lord Christopher, mentioned the specific issue about the Scilly Isles. I looked into that and I understand that the Department for Transport is in receipt of a funding bid from Cornwall Council and will make a decision very soon. We appreciate how fundamentally important tourism is to the economy of the Scilly Isles and the importance of maintaining a ferry link, but I understand that there are also strong feelings about the terminal building and the harbour works, which also need to be resolved or taken into account by Ministers. But it is an ongoing consideration.

The noble Lord, Lord Palmer, and my noble friend Lord Caithness, mentioned the air passenger duty per plane. Of course, tax is a matter for the Chancellor and announcements are generally made on these issues at Budget times. The Government are exploring changes to the aviation tax system, which will be subject to consultation, but I certainly hear what noble Lords say about the costs of travel in this country. They gave some startling comparisons between costs—and the fact that you can take a package holiday abroad for the cost of a train fare within the UK.

My noble friends Lord Stoneham and Lord Marks commented on the opportunities for work experience of one sort or another provided by the Olympics. My noble friend Lord Stoneham mentioned particularly that the tourism and hospitality sectors were very often a source of first employment for young people. Those are areas that we will be taking forward in conjunction with the Department for Education and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, to ensure that there is a package of opportunities for work experience which will be afforded by the upcoming major events in this country.

My noble friend Lord Caithness mentioned the lack of signs on motorways and elsewhere to venues and places of interest around the country. I understand that the Department for Transport is currently undertaking a review of road traffic signs, so there may be light at the end of that tunnel. We hope so.

My noble friend Lord Selsdon mentioned the importance of fun in all these areas. It would be a mistake in any debate on tourism not to say how much sheer enjoyment is generated by this sector of industry.

The lack of internet connections and lack of technology in tourism cropped up in one or two speeches. Noble Lords may be interested to hear about one aspect of that; last year VisitBritain entered into a memorandum of understanding with Samsung, and there are other ongoing dialogues with the internet industry to try to ensure that we are fully covered for visitors who expect internet provision.

I am aware that I probably have not answered all the questions asked. This has been an extraordinarily rich and varied debate, with contributions from all around the House. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, that we have so many opportunities to visit interesting and exciting places in this wonderful country of ours. I very much welcome all the contributions that have been made.

The tourism strategy is waiting to be revealed. My understanding is that it should be published next month. There are a great many strands to it, which my colleagues in DCMS have been trying to tie together. They are hoping for a comprehensive strategy to help move forward in all the ways that have been highlighted in this debate, and to show how our tourism sector deserves maximum support if it is to fulfil the great ambitions we have for it. As I have mentioned, the marketing and public relations campaign is well on target and the Government have been absolutely delighted with the response from a number of major industries on contributing to that campaign. The response from private individuals is also highly necessary if we are to make the most of all the treasures we have to offer in this country and attract people from overseas as well as domestic tourism.

In conclusion, tourism is a priority for government. This has, I hope, been demonstrated by the Prime Minister's public support for tourism, which has not always been the case in previous Administrations. This encouragement has come from the top, and repeatedly. We have secured public funding for tourism for the next four years, in spite of the fact that we live in hard times and there will inevitably be reductions in some areas. The Secretary of State has given backing for a sustainable tourism legacy. A number of noble Lords, including my noble friend Lord Marks, referred to this important aspect, as did the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, who is very much involved in this issue, and whose expertise we so much value, given all her dealings with London's involvement in the Olympics.

The forthcoming tourism strategy, which is confidently and breathlessly expected, will, I am sure, pull together a number of these issues. With constructive partnership between the industry and government, tourism will continue to play a key part in the UK's economic and fiscal recovery. We face an exciting decade for this

vibrant industry. We have already heard the list of one-off events that are coming to this country in the next few years, in addition to the major sporting, cultural and other events which take place from year to year.

If I have not answered any questions, I shall certainly attempt to write to noble Lords with answers. Finally, I thank all noble Lords for their creative and stimulating contributions. In particular, I thank my noble friend Lord Younger for securing the debate. I again congratulate noble Lords who made their maiden speeches.

4.09 pm

The Viscount Younger of Leckie: My Lords, I also thank all those who contributed to today's debate. I am particularly pleased that it struck a chord as being an important debate for the tourism sector and the country as a whole at this particular time.

I pay tribute to the six outstanding, different and thought-provoking maiden speeches. The other contributions were wide ranging and in some cases rather direct, which is no bad thing. I particularly point out the views that came from my noble friends Lord Caithness and Lord Palmer who highlighted the cost of travel within the UK. To conclude, I want to pick out three key themes that the debate brought out. I hope not to take too much of your Lordships' time.

The first theme, which may not surprise noble Lords, is funding. There is no doubt that there is a shortage and that funding is fragmented. I will pick up on a minor point made by the noble Lord, Lord Christopher, when he spoke about his project in Cornwall, which is that Europe is certainly not always forthcoming in producing funds. More importantly, my noble friend Lady Wheatcroft correctly pointed out that there was far too much short-termism in investment. That was echoed by my noble friend Lord Stoneham of Droxford who said that there should be much more long-term investment in tourism and from the private sector.

Secondly, it is important that tourism is pushed up the political agenda. In the past, all Governments have not promoted tourism enough. That was pointed out eloquently by my noble friends Lord Lee of Trafford and Lord Caithness. Tourism needs to be in the manifestos of Governments. That is particularly important as there is such a strong link between tourism and job creation, especially at this time.

Thirdly, it is clear that there is a great need to market tourism within all areas of the UK. That was highlighted initially by the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, when he spoke about Welsh castles. I think I am right in saying that Asian visitors like them the best. Also, my noble friend Lord Palmer of Childs Hill created an interesting and different angle to the debate when he focused on urban tourism speaking about Barnet and industrial Manchester, and it is right that we should focus on that.

I conclude by highlighting a degree of caution when we look at tourism statistics, because in undertaking research I discovered that there was certainly a need for a degree of consistency and simplification. That is a point for the industry and Government to note for the future. With that, I beg leave to withdraw the Motion.

Motion withdrawn.

Defence: Military Covenant

Question for Short Debate

4.12 pm

Asked By **The Lord Bishop of Wakefield**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how the military covenant will be covered by the strategic defence and security review.

The Lord Bishop of Wakefield: My Lords, I am grateful to have the opportunity to introduce this Question for Short Debate. Well before the strategic defence and security review, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*, was published, the Church of England already wanted to contribute to the wider debate on our national concern for global security. That was when I was asked, as someone with a background in foreign affairs—albeit mainly in ecclesiastical settings—to be a spokesperson for the church on defence and global security issues. We are also keen to reflect on the nature of the military covenant, whereby we underpin our commitment as a nation to those who risk their lives on our behalf. The impetus for this debate predates both the review and the Strachan report on the military covenant.

The response to the SDSR, when it was published, produced at least as much heat as it did light and, if it is not mixing metaphors too much, it was easy for that to cloud serious reflections on the issues at hand. In my own contribution to the debate on the review, I drew attention to what I believed to be a lack of any full narrative about the global role that we might expect Britain to play and the corresponding resources that might be needed to sustain this. I remain convinced that we should urgently return to that. Of course, the national security strategy has provided some of that narrative in terms of what we ought to be doing as a nation. It is still not clear, however, whether that yet dovetails with the answers that the SDSR gave about what is possible for us to do as a nation, given our finite resources.

We are all sharply aware of the financial restraints placed upon us following a serious global recession. That made the publication of the review a matter of urgency. Indeed, I noted in my reflections that the review had an interim feel to it. There is no time to be lost in making a realistic assessment of the resources available in this next decade and deciding how we might most profitably deploy them so as to make an effective and strategic contribution to global security. I hope that we shall return to a principled debate on strategy in the near future in this House and in the other place.

In preparing for this debate I have consulted a number of people who, from their experience as senior military personnel, have a better reservoir of knowledge than I could ever have. They have generously commented as well on aspects of the military covenant. I shall focus more immediately on the covenant itself, and I begin with a brief local vignette. Six months ago I presided at the service at Halifax Minster for the laying up of the colours of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment. The regiment has now become a battalion within the Yorkshire Regiment.

It was a very moving occasion, provoking not only powerful feelings among the military personnel present, and there were plenty of them, but equally powerful responses from the citizens of Halifax, both young and old. The Duke's regiment had been their regiment and often the soldiers had been their soldiers, so the memories—some black and sorrowful, some heroic and inspiring—were their memories. It was an instructive and very personal indication of the significance of the relationship of mutuality, trust and respect between a community and its military personnel. In other words, here was the military covenant earthed in a local community.

The stream of funerals at Wakefield Cathedral of service personnel from Afghanistan has been another sharp reminder of the cost of war and of what we expect of those who offer their lives for military service. There is no other role within society where the reality of giving one's life is so sharply within focus, or where the expectations of the role—that is, the covenant with servicepeople and their families—has quite the same edge. Death is one reality that cannot be ruled out, and the rawness of our emotions cannot be downplayed.

This short debate gives us an opportunity to look afresh at the military covenant and how it was covered by the SDSR. I shall focus on the welfare issues within the covenant, allowing others to focus elsewhere if they wish. We can do so, of course, alongside the recommendations of the Strachan report, on which I believe the Government should be duly congratulated. That task force has stimulated fresh ways of thinking about how the Government and society as a whole can fulfil their obligations to develop further the military covenant which, rather like our constitution, is unwritten and is perhaps best left in that form.

All in this House would doubtless agree that ensuring that the covenant is in robust health is as much a moral imperative as it is a strategic one. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those who have served and continue to serve in our Armed Forces. I have already alluded to the potential costs to individuals and families. I shall use this occasion also to pay particular tribute to the dedicated and loyal service provided by those who support them, including our military chaplains past and present. I also pay tribute to reservists, now numbering some 20,000 recently serving. I should say that that includes two clergy from our own diocese, who have been on active service in Iraq and Afghanistan in these past years.

That moves me on to ask some practical questions. First, what steps have been taken to update the existing package on terms and conditions of service, and what is the envisaged timeframe for the development of a new employment model? Alongside this, I am prompted to ask for some indicators in education. The Strachan report points to education throughout the service career as a priority and the SDSR highlights support to ex-service personnel to study at university. I have commented on the Browne report's impact in another debate in the Chamber and would welcome assurance that the changes in higher education funding will not delay the SDSR's recommendations in this area.

I revert to the excellent work of the Strachan task force. As I have hinted, the avoidance of semi-legal language is much to be welcomed. Those noble Lords who have sight of the more scurrilous of the tabloids will know that the Anglican Communion is itself struggling to put together a covenant. Similar issues of legalism or non-legalism have arisen there. I am sure that legalism is best avoided all round. Interestingly, the Old Testament is riven with a number of different models of covenant. The most attractive feature of all of them is an avoidance of a language which legislates. Instead, the model is one of gift. Each partner willingly gifts to the other. Here, we begin with a gift of military service and a paired gift is offered by the nation to all in military service. That gift is shared by government and the wider community. It is eloquently set out in the task force's document.

Within all that, however, we need confidence that such gifting is assured, especially from government. Here there are lacunae. In neither Strachan nor the SDSR is there an analysis of the welfare needs of serving personnel and veterans. Any research into that has been ad hoc and piecemeal. There are real questions about the ability of regiments and corps individually to look after families. There are also specific issues about the adequacy of support for reservists as they return to their normal work following the pressured extremes of military service. These issues argue for a permanent mechanism through which we can review the situation in the future. I realise that the question of how we assess the treatment of Armed Forces personnel has been raised in another place within the context of the Armed Forces Bill. As I understand it, the independent external reference group, which assesses annual progress against the service personnel Command Paper, is due to be phased out or brought in-house to the Ministry of Defence, where its independence is less assured. Could the Minister shed some light on the logic of that decision?

Finally, I accept that this time of financial stringency is hardly one in which to encourage the setting up of new posts and appointments, but ought there not to be someone who effectively acts as the reviewer of armed services welfare? That might be combined with other work while remaining a distinctive function. The reviewer would report to the Secretary of State for Defence perhaps once every four years. Such a statutory measure might help depoliticise our discussions on the military covenant and ensure that the sacrifices that I mentioned earlier are responded to by a proper sense of giftedness from the nation's side of the covenant. Without a clear assurance here, one cannot guarantee the relationship essential in a military covenant. Field Marshal Montgomery commented:

"Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence".

This confidence must be rooted in a mutually assured covenant which has clarity about both its purpose and its commitment. Again, Montgomery noted—and I conclude—that:

"Theological virtues amount to this: get your major purpose clear, take off your plate all which hinders that purpose and hold hard to all which helps it, and then go ahead with a clear conscience, courage, sincerity and selflessness".

4.23 pm

Lord Glenarthur: My Lords, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield has done us all a service both by initiating this short debate and in his thoughtful and interesting speech. He has done so close on the heels of the debate earlier today held by my noble friend Lord King. I will again concentrate my remarks on the reserves of all three military services, to which the right reverend Prelate referred, and the relevance of the military covenant to them.

I have read the *Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant*—the Strachan report—which was published in September. On page 19, paragraph 2.5 addresses the issues of reservists. I very much endorse what it says about the lack of on-base support, which is mostly available to regular service families. In particular, there are practical difficulties for reservists who return rapidly from deployments to their civilian occupations, far removed from military units. I dwelt on this in my noble friend's debate this morning. My interest in this lies, as my noble friend on the Front Bench knows, in my long-serving capacity as honorary colonel and honorary air commodore to medical reserve units.

I will highlight three of the report's policy options in relation to reservists. First, on recognised identity cards for reservists, I was astonished to discover from the report that not all reservists are regularly issued with identity cards. As the rubric at the bottom of the page says, some get them but some do not. Even I get one, much to my astonishment, as the honorary air commodore of a Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadron. What is being done to address this issue, which would perhaps allow such benefits as the practical opportunity to access the joint personnel administration system remotely? What can be done to help those who do not work with the reserves all the time but spend some of their time in civilian employment?

Secondly, there is the question of providing information to reservists' general practitioners. It seems bizarre that, evidently, there is currently no system to transfer an individual's Defence Medical Services records back to his or her GP after deployment. Having spent many years in health administration, I would say that this is extraordinarily poor clinical governance, which should be put right at once. There should also be help for GPs in making available help for reservists. My noble friend on the Front Bench made some encouraging remarks about this earlier. In the days of digital data transmission, I simply cannot believe that it is too complex an issue to administer. I would be very grateful if the Minister could write to me about it in greater detail.

Thirdly, support from employers is part of a theme that I and my colleagues on the National Employer Advisory Board addressed over many years. There should certainly be support from employers but there should also certainly be support for employers, so that they can more readily understand the nature of military service of any kind, but particularly reserve service. We used to have a scheme known as Employers Abroad, which the Americans and Australians call Boss Lift. It allowed employers to visit reservists on exercises and operations so that they experienced some of the activities, witnessed the camaraderie and sense of purpose that existed among their employees' service units and developed

[LORD GLENARTHUR]

a sense of what these individuals do and how that can be brought back and made use of in the civilian workplace. I have taken part in several of these.

However, I understand that the Employers Abroad scheme was stopped, or at least put on hold, some six months ago, following a Cabinet Office directive to do with a freeze on marketing. Frankly, sometimes I despair. My colleagues and I have spent 10 years or more, during deployment on two huge operations, at the highest levels of the MoD, explaining the need to win and maintain the support of reservists' employers at a time when some 10 per cent—more than the 20,000 referred to by the right reverend Prelate—of reservists had been deployed. I hope that my noble friend will accept that it is wholly counterproductive in the longer term to diminish that effort and put at risk all the relationships that have been worked on so hard, particularly by SaBRE—Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers—which has worked at the coal face on this with civilian communities up and down the country. As page 5 of the report on the military covenant says:

“Many people in Britain have little or no contact with the Armed Forces and have little understanding of military life. There is a need to build on public support to create a greater and more enduring understanding”.

The right reverend Prelate referred in his comments—perhaps elliptically, although I know that he meant to refer to it—to something called defence career partnering, which is another issue that I was deeply involved with as chairman of the National Employer Advisory Board. It stemmed from a wish to see much more flexibility in the careers of individuals, whether regulars or reservists. However, as we have heard, it has recently developed legs, so to speak, and has produced innovative concepts, some of which are very relevant indeed to the military covenant. They could be helpful across a broad range of circumstances.

It was not always easy to advance the concept of defence career partnering. I spent two years or so as co-chairman of the MoD steering group on the subject. There were those who readily grasped the possibility of positive outcomes for the benefit of defence and industry, but some were not so easily convinced. What surprised me, however, was that there was a very real enthusiasm on the part of industry in many forms to find partnering opportunities, not just in terms of careers but in a much wider sense, so I am encouraged to begin to believe—perhaps my noble friend will confirm whether I am right—that, whereas defence career partnering is not a whole answer to many issues, it is at least part of the answer. The fact that it is owned now by the MoD, not by a single service, is of huge benefit. In some elements of it, I can well understand the complexities in terms of career planning, such as sorting out terms and conditions of service. Some of the issues are closely related to what the right reverend Prelate said about returning servicemen and so on.

We are talking about mutual benefit. If we are fully to grasp the notion of the big society, so strongly advocated by my right honourable friend the Prime Minister, does my noble friend not agree that we have to be rather more broad-minded in what can be achieved through flexible and willing partnering relationships?

Will he perhaps take the time to review the progress to date, in particular the very genuine offer of support from industry and others, and does he not agree that such an initiative could do much to enhance the value of the military covenant?

4.31 pm

Lord Lee of Trafford: My Lords, first, I congratulate the right reverend Prelate on initiating this debate. I declare interests as vice-chairman of the All-Party Group on the Armed Forces and president of the relatively newly formed Liberal Democrat Friends of the Armed Forces.

In recent years, particularly during the conflict in Afghanistan, there has been a welcome upsurge in support for our Armed Forces: increasing support through the media; increasing support here in Parliament, welcoming the returning troops; and, of course, a much wider support among the general public. Prior to the 2010 election, both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats commissioned reports into the state of the military covenant. *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, published in May 2010, made a commitment to,

“work to rebuild the Military Covenant”.

In June, the Prime Minister indicated that the military covenant would be enshrined in law for the first time. Then, in summer 2010, the coalition Government established a task force on the military covenant, chaired by Professor Hew Strachan, who was referred to earlier, to support taking that work forward.

The SDSR, published in October 2010, talked of rebuilding and formalising the covenant, and went on:

“The Covenant represents a promise of fair treatment, on behalf of the nation, to ensure personnel are valued and respected as individuals and that they and their families will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service”.

However, there was also the ominous warning:

“We cannot shield the Armed Forces from the consequences of the economic circumstances we face”.

What we have to do, as interested and supportive politicians, is to compare rhetoric with reality—to congratulate but also to question and, perhaps, to admonish where necessary.

Fairness demands that we acknowledge some of the previous Government's achievements: doubling the compensation payments for the seriously injured; doubling the welfare grant for families of those on operations; giving better access to housing schemes and healthcare; giving free access to further education for service leavers with six years' service; and more phones and internet access for those deployed in Afghanistan.

The coalition Government started well, doubling the operational allowance for Armed Forces serving in Afghanistan and providing university and further education scholarships for children of those killed in action since 1990. However, I have to question some of the reductions in allowances that were announced last week. Taking away or reducing existing allowances can create disproportionate ill feeling and in my view should be contemplated only where allowances are grossly excessive or overgenerous. Changes have been

made to the home-to-duty travel allowance, which assists personnel with the cost of daily travel between their home and place of duty. At present individuals are responsible for the first three miles of their journey. In future this will increase to nine miles—heaven knows why that figure was chosen and where it comes from—even when they have no choice in the location of either home or duty premises. This change will be introduced over three years. The disturbance allowance is to be reduced by 10 per cent. For those with children, the additional elements previously paid will be reduced by 53 per cent. The “get you home (early years)” allowance is designed to enable junior members of the services to maintain links with close family as they adjust to service life by funding four journeys to the family home per year. In future, it will be available only to those undergoing initial training and for all personnel under the age of 18. The “get you home (seagoers)” allowance is designed to support retention of seagoing personnel by reducing the impact of routine separation. The current provision of 12 journeys to the individual’s place of residence will be reduced to 10. Some of those reductions are a little mean and disappointing.

In preparing for this debate, I carefully read *Hansard* covering the Second Reading of the Armed Forces Bill on 10 January in the other place. Interestingly, virtually all the debate focused on covenant issues. The Secretary of State said that,

“the Bill sets out the framework for the covenant”.

Perhaps most importantly he gave a specific commitment to lay,

“an annual forces covenant report”,—[*Official Report, Commons, 10/1/11; cols. 47-48.*]

before Parliament each year covering healthcare, education and housing, with discretion to go beyond those topics.

As regards service accommodation, we all know the financial pressures that the MoD faces but it is vital that necessary repairs and maintenance are carried out, otherwise a much greater liability develops. I wish to ask my noble friend one or two questions. What extra provision is being made to accommodate serving personnel and their families when they return from being based in Germany, as half will return by 2015 and the remaining half by 2020? The previous Government originally promised that all the proceeds from the sale of Chelsea Barracks would go back into Armed Forces accommodation. The site was sold for £959 million. How much of that was actually spent where it was intended to be spent? The previous Government said that the final £159 million of the proceeds would be subject to negotiation with the Treasury. Has the money definitely been spent on accommodation?

However, not everything can, or should, be done by Government. Charities such as Help for Heroes have achieved outstanding results, but there are also smaller, yet very successful, supportive specialised charities; for example, Tickets for Troops, a registered charity which provides free tickets to musical, sporting, entertainment and cultural events for members of our Armed Forces, and is led by the noble Lord, Lord Marland. This was launched in November 2009.

Since then more than a quarter of a million tickets have been donated and 85,000 troops have signed up to the scheme.

4.38 pm

Lord Ramsbotham: My Lords, I too congratulate the right reverend Prelate on obtaining this debate. Having spent many happy hours and days in Bishop’s Lodge, Wakefield, when my father was the bishop, I am sure that under him it is in equally good hands.

Yesterday the Cross-Benchers had the great pleasure and privilege of having the Prime Minister address us for nearly an hour. I made a point of asking him what he meant by, and intended by, the Armed Forces covenant. He replied that it was a debt that the nation owed to the Armed Forces in return for them putting their lives on the line that amounted to a fair reward and lifelong support for them and their families. I cannot think of a better description.

I was extremely glad to note that the Armed Forces covenant was mentioned in the SDSR, which showed that, although a lot of it was about equipment, people have not forgotten that Armed Forces issues are essentially about people. However, I hope that nobody thinks that the Armed Forces covenant is merely an SDSR issue to be revisited in 2015. It is a living issue, today and every day. There is a particular purpose to it which I will come to.

As Professor Hew Strachan mentioned in his report on the Armed Forces covenant, commissioned by the Prime Minister, the covenant is not one covenant but three covenants in one. The first is between the Government and the Armed Forces. That essentially covers the care and support of members of the Armed Forces during and after their service. I make no apology for returning to an issue that I raised this morning in the debate secured by the noble Lord, Lord King of Bridgwater, namely the question of a Veterans Minister. I believe firmly that unless there is a named person responsible and accountable for overseeing the covenant, it will not happen.

The Minister took me to task because he thought that I was suggesting that there should be centralised control and direction. I was not saying that at all. I have said many times on the Floor of this House that there is “what” and “how” in making certain that things happen. The Government should deliver the “what” and the “how” should be left to local areas. This morning I quoted examples of local areas that are implementing this. The trouble is that recently people have been swamped with “how”. We do not need it: we need “what”, and somebody needs to be doing it.

My reason for mentioning the Cabinet Office was highlighted by a letter that I was copied into from the rehabilitation services group in the Ministry of Justice. It states:

“Our Minister is aware of the content of The Murrison Report”, into mental health issues, which we discussed this morning,

“but as it does not contain specific recommendations for the MOJ it has not generated the need for formal response at this time. However, we would of course want to support any work which improves the delivery of health services to offenders. To that end, if DH”—

[LORD RAMSBOTHAM]
Department of Health—

“policy is sufficiently developed in the future to include new and/or veteran specific elements then we will want to engage to ensure that delivery of that to prisoners and offenders in the community is as effective as possible”.

In other words, we are doing nothing until somebody co-ordinates it. This relates to the covenant.

The second part of the covenant is between the nation and the Armed Forces. The return from the nation is seen most obviously in the donations given to service charities, and in the use that the charities put them to.

The third part, which we must never forget, is within the command chain. My ancestor, Sir John Moore, laid down the ethos of the Rifle Brigade, the regiment that I joined. He said that it was a mutual bond of trust and affection between officers and riflemen, which the officers had to earn. That is very true: the mutual bond of trust and affection between the structure of the forces and the people serving is something that has to be earned. That structure includes government. There have been examples of where it has not been earned. The covenant is the most obvious demonstration that that trust is understood and is being earned.

I am very glad that the right reverend Prelate mentioned veterans, whom we discussed earlier. I will say something briefly about those who I am very worried might become veterans prematurely unless the full implications of the Armed Forces covenant are implemented and understood. -I remember a black year in my service, 1977, when the Government of the time implemented what was known as the Irishman’s pay rise, when the pay increase was less than the charges made on soldiers. I remember commanding officers resigning because they refused to stand up to tell their men that what was being offered was good, because they knew it to be bad. I am very concerned that the chain of command must be told the truth—not least at a time when we are asking enormous operational sacrifices by our men and women, as one can hear for oneself if one goes to talk to them.

So it was that last week, I saw allowances being cut. When I see all the heat being engendered by the Officers’ Pensions Society over the reduction in pensions, I think back to that time and I am enormously worried about the trends that I see creeping into retention rates, particularly of experienced people, commanding officers and bright young people, before their service is ended. If ever there was a warning sign to the Government, that is it. Please, please, please do not tamper with the covenant. It means something. It means that the Armed Forces will be there on behalf of the nation to do what the nation expects them to do, as it has had so vividly and regularly illustrated over the years.

4.45 pm

The Lord Bishop of Hereford: My Lords, like others, I thank my friend and colleague the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield for making this debate possible.

The themes of both the military covenant and the strategic defence and security review require of us an understanding and valuing of identity and role: our

identity as a United Kingdom in today’s and tomorrow’s world and, therefore, our potential role in military terms, including strategic defence and security. Just as those are issues in the review, so it seems to me the issues of the identity and role of our military personnel lie deep within our understanding of the military covenant, which links us with those who risk their lives on our behalf—and on behalf of peace and security in other countries—and whom we so greatly value, appreciate and honour. As we heard from the Minister in the earlier debate today, there are already 236,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. As he also reminded us, many of those are young. I will return to that later.

I can identify with my friend and colleague the right reverend Prelate about the military covenant being earthed in local communities. Your Lordships will not be surprised to learn that that is represented very strongly within Hereford diocese, with all our links with the Rifles and the Queen’s Dragoon Guards. The regiment was given the honour and freedom of the city of Hereford and is held in such high esteem throughout the county—and, indeed, much more widely—as shown by the number of people who turned out in our streets to honour the servicemen on their return from Afghanistan, the numbers in attendance when the freedom of the city was given to the regiment a few years ago and the increasing number who are there on Remembrance Sunday as well as, tragically, when needed, on the occasion of funerals.

As we have been reminded, part of the military covenant is to provide care not just for our military personnel but for their families. I pay tribute to the introduction of the Elizabeth Cross and its recognition and valuing of the families of those killed in action. I know from first-hand experience how much that is appreciated and what a difference it makes to them.

I turn to the theme of the consequences of the cuts in allowances, which has just been mentioned by the noble Lord. I also express concern at the way in which the current salami-slicing weakens how our military personnel are valued. Sadly, I know of soldiers for whom that salami-slicing has become a tipping point for their leaving the armed services—just as we heard other accounts of that earlier. That lack of valuing leads potentially to a weakening of morale as well as to people leaving the services.

Perhaps I may also observe that military personnel may be lost easily but, as some noble Lords will know far better than me, replacing them takes much longer and is much more difficult. For example, it may take many years for the regiment near us in Hereford to replace or build up its numbers due to the length and demands of the training. That is a further reason why we should not take lightly the consequences of the recent reduction in allowances.

Care for military personnel once they finish their service is also a vital area, which was again referred to in our earlier debate. Once more, such care seems to be an area in which we need to improve as much as possible because that, too, is part of the covenant with our personnel. As noble Lords referred to earlier, there needs to be ongoing healthcare, both physical and mental, and we also need to ensure that we

provide as best we can the support, encouragement and opportunities for employment that younger veterans go on to when their term of service comes to an end.

We were also reminded earlier by the noble Viscount, Lord Slim, that there is a special need to care for the families of wounded service men and women, including widows and widowers as I have already mentioned. Therefore, I add my voice to those calling for the utmost care to be taken in any reductions in allowances, given the potentially deleterious effect on reducing morale and weakening the covenant. There may also be consequences on the length of time and difficulty involved in recruiting new people if such salami-slicing does indeed become a tipping point for people leaving.

4.52 pm

Lord Sheikh: My Lords, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to a second debate on defence matters in your Lordships' House today. The subject that we are discussing now is as important as the topic of our earlier debate. The theme running through both is the duty that we, the nation, owe to those who risk their lives and serious injury for the sake of our security. I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield on providing the House with the opportunity to debate these vital issues.

The importance of the military covenant has attracted increasing focus in recent years, not least as the terrible suffering incurred by those who have served in military conflicts has become increasingly apparent. The first duty of government is to secure the defence of the realm, and undoubtedly the most vital asset in that endeavour is the people who undertake that task. That is the basis for the military covenant, and it is our obligation to ensure that we consider and address their needs. Unhappy service families can result only in unhappy service personnel, and that would represent a failure to meet the terms of the military covenant.

There has been much academic interest in and commentary on the various components of the strategic defence and security review. The themes of these commentaries have been included in the wider debates that we have had in your Lordships' House on defence matters, including our consideration of the strategic defence and security review in November last year. The strategic defence and security review contains much to be welcomed—not least that this was the first such review for 12 years. Much has changed in the nature of the threats that we face, in the nature of our Armed Forces and in public opinion over that period. To ensure that we continue to align effectively the changes with the requirements of the military covenant, I welcome the Government's commitment to make these reviews a regular occurrence.

However, it is important that we do not forget the context in which the review was conducted. Commitments and overspending on defence projects under the previous Government totalled some £36 billion—three times the annual defence budget. In that context the delivery of an 8 per cent reduction in the Ministry of Defence budget was an extreme challenge. We should not diminish the seriousness of the situation in which the strategic defence and security review was prepared and considered.

Those who serve our country have the right to expect that the Government will look after their well-being and the well-being of their families. Whatever the deficiencies of previous approaches, we must make sure that we live up to that ambition, and I believe that the Government have made a good start. However, they have started from a low base. The outcome of the Armed Force Continuous Attitudes Survey in May 2010 revealed that only 32 per cent of our Armed Forces felt valued. That should cause us all alarm and alert us that action needs to be taken.

An example of the Government's commitment to reverse this negativity can be seen in the decision to double the operational allowance. That, in the climate of wider fiscal tightening, is a sign of the priority that the Government attach to those serving in our Armed Forces in theatre. The Armed Forces Bill, which is currently under consideration in another place, contains provisions that will require the Secretary of State to produce an annual report to Parliament on the health of the military covenant. That is a bold and decisive step and will enable us to keep a much tighter, focused scrutiny on how the military covenant is being advanced. It is right that more rigorous attention should be paid to how the military covenant is being delivered and that the Government are able to explain how we are meeting our side of the bargain.

The decisions that had to be made in constructing the strategic defence and security review were undoubtedly complex. Balancing the nature of the threats that we must overcome with the horrific fiscal pressures that confront us as a nation in order to arrive at a balanced and coherent strategic posture is not simple. Undoubtedly, repairing the damage to the military covenant that has arisen in recent years cannot be done in a vacuum and the Minister has a difficult path to tread. In that context, I should be grateful if he could confirm that the Government's commitment to the military covenant is not conditional. I know that the Government have been working very hard to identify areas for savings and where better outcomes can be delivered most cost-effectively. In guiding his approach to the military covenant, I hope that the Minister can assure us that his focus will continue to be on the needs of those who serve in our Armed Forces, the needs of their families and the needs of those who are now veterans, and that the important measures contained in the strategic defence and security review will contribute to our efforts in restoring and then maintaining the military covenant. Our troops—present and past—deserve nothing less.

5 pm

Lord Bilimoria: My Lords, when he was Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister David Cameron made this assertion:

"Everyone should know what an enormous priority the Conservative Party attaches to our Armed Forces and to keeping Britain safe, and we will always make the spending necessary to deliver that".

I thank the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield for initiating this crucial debate at this time.

All jobs are important, but the military are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, so they are always a special case. There has to be a special arrangement to

[LORD BILIMORIA]

compensate for that sacrifice. I always thought that the special arrangement ought to be delivered through government. I always thought that it was through government that the gratitude of the people could be expressed, and servicemen and their families looked after and remunerated well, and their equipment, clothes, weaponry, accommodation at home and abroad and trauma care supplied and subsidised at the best possible level by a nation that is committed for a lifetime. This is where we as a country have gone down a slippery slope. In India, my father was General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Central Army Command. There I know a soldier's family is cared for for life, well after the death of the serviceman, as my grandmother and my mother have experienced. There is a commitment, a strong bond, that holds the soldier to his country, and the soldier's family is born into the military family, as I was. This trust and care encourages camaraderie, morale and esprit de corps, which you cannot buy.

The previous Government got the balance between the public and private sectors completely wrong. I have said this before a number of times. Public spending went up to nearly 50 per cent of GDP when it should be nearly 40 per cent. As for the Armed Forces, we have got it the wrong way round. Public pay is not high enough, and we are making further cuts, as we have heard. Cuts worth £250 million are being made to servicemen's allowances. Surely these are the people who should suffer last at a time of economic austerity, given what they are sacrificing. We must view the NATO level of 2 per cent of GDP on defence expenditure as a base, not a ceiling. While defence expenditure is set to go up over the spending review period in cash terms, as a percentage of GDP it is actually going to go down. Over the past three decades, our defence expenditure as a percentage of GDP has halved from 5 per cent. In 2009, it was 2.5 per cent. We are at war at the moment and, if you do the sums, you could argue that we are already at 1.5 per cent of GDP.

Our Armed Forces are spread too thinly. The SDSR is all about means, it is not about ends. We have aircraft carriers without aircraft and nuclear submarines without AWACS, and I fear that that is where the covenant is heading. It is now written in law for the first time in the Armed Forces Bill, but there is little action to justify those words. I just heard first hand a story from my son at boarding school. His friend's uncle is a commanding officer and has recently had to use his own money to buy clothing and boots for his troops. Are we really stooping to this level? This parsimony reaches well beyond equipment. I am sure that most of us remember that in June 2008 the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Dannatt, who is in his place, pointed out that the starting salary of a new recruit was, on average, £16,000 compared, at that time, with the basic salary of a traffic warden of over £20,000. The pay scale has risen, but in line with inflation. It has not risen in line with the level of sacrifice that these men and women are making.

This SDSR has been drafted in wartime. We have to keep in mind the future. People's memories can be short, especially when we enter a peacetime period. Our Armed Forces need to know that the covenant will be honoured in peace and in war. To protect the

needs and interests of our Armed Forces, including our reserve forces, at home and abroad is not a choice the Government must make. It is compulsory. It is required because the Government are not just making good on their own commitment, they are holding true to the promise of the people. I do not think that any of us can question the strength and emotion of the people of this country. We see it expressed time and again. Just look at the support garnered through charities and the private sector. This is the big society at work. We have Help the Heroes, the Army Benevolent Fund, the Soldiers' Charity and the Royal British Legion. I could go on.

It is very good to hear that the Government plan to start to right the discrepancy between compensation for physical injuries and for mental illnesses. For too long, the mental stresses and strains of our servicemen have had to be endured. They have not been recognised and have been undercompensated. Just this month, a professor at the Department of Psychology, Harvard University, told me the harrowing fact that in January 2009, for example, more United States soldiers committed suicide after returning from the battlefield than were killed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.

It is the people's promise to repay the tremendous debt of gratitude that this nation owes to its Armed Forces. We know that soldiers attempt to fulfil their duties, whatever the circumstances; it is the commitment that they have made. But soldiers' confidence and morale reaches much higher levels when they know that they have the support of the people back home, and the trust and support of the Government. They must know that the country can trust that the Government will take care of them while they are fighting, that they will take care of their families, that that is a priority, and that they will always show that commitment.

How can they feel that it is a priority when they see the way in which so many veterans are treated and some of the appalling accommodation that is available during peacetime and wartime? How can they feel that it is a priority when they are worried about the well-being of their families? In India, after my father died, my mother was, and still is, given the utmost level of care, affection and respect by the Indian Army. It is a lifetime commitment. We need to guarantee that veterans never feel as though their sacrifices have been forgotten.

The noble Lord, Lord Ramsbotham, suggested that we should have an independent commissioner. I believe that we should have an independent veterans' commission. A veterans' commissioner would co-ordinate outside the MoD and look at pensions, social security, prisons, health and charities to ensure that our veterans are protected and cared for because of the incredible contribution that they have made. There needs to be a balance between the MoD and the Armed Forces. The NHS has scared me greatly because doctors and nurses are often overshadowed by NHS managerial staff. In the MoD and the Armed Forces, is the tail wagging the dog?

In conclusion, the services are called the services because they serve our country. The right reverend Prelate spoke about leadership. Last week, this was explained to me by Professor Ranjay Gulati at Harvard Business School as a tripos: logos—the knowledge

and experience needed to garner trust and respect from those who follow you; pathos—the emotional intelligence and understanding needed to form bonds with those who follow you; and ethos—the possession and adherence to a set of moral and ethical values that are important to those who follow you. The Armed Forces epitomise service leadership.

At Sandhurst, where my grandfather was commissioned, the motto was “Serve to Lead”. At the Indian Military Academy, where my father was commissioned, the motto was:

“The safety, honour and welfare of your country, come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command comes next. Your own ease, comfort and safety comes last, always and every time”.

The Army is keeping its side of the covenant. I know that the Minister believes in the covenant. Unfortunately, the Government do not, and we as a nation should be ashamed of this.

5.08 pm

Lord Marlesford: My Lords, many years ago the *Times* had a very influential leading article headed, “It is a Moral Issue”. I was particularly glad that the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield referred to the moral dimension of the military covenant. I believe that military service is a huge privilege for those who are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to serve. My brief and wholly undistinguished national service in the Army, in which I never heard a shot fired in anger, has had a lifelong influence on me. Perhaps most of all, it has given me some understanding of the Armed Forces and certainly a lifelong interest in their welfare.

I was very glad to hear the noble Lord, Lord Ramsbotham, refer to the Prime Minister’s definition of the military covenant, which is clearly an extremely good one. In the short time we have to speak, I would like to explore some of the detail. First, we must never forget that the military covenant is of a higher order than the obligations of the Government towards any other people they employ. There are two reasons for that, the first being that people in the Armed Forces are less able to enforce or even advocate their own interests than any other employees of the state. The second reason is, of course, that they might die. If we try to analyse what the military covenant is all about, it is the obligation to ensure that our Armed Forces are given the resources and conditions with which to carry out the missions that are assigned to them. The first thing is indubitably obvious, but sadly in recent history it appears not to have been obvious. It is that the Government of the day must ensure that a proper analysis is made of the proposed commitment before any forces are committed to a theatre. We will not know for a few months yet exactly how that did or did not apply in the case of Iraq, but I am afraid it is clear that it was not properly worked out when it came to Afghanistan.

The individual components of the obligation are many, including the quality and quantity of equipment required, which means everything down to the fuel and the ammunition, along with the other supplies for that equipment. It includes adequate training of all personnel before they are committed to the field,

proper sustenance in the form of food and clothing, and medical services, particularly on the battlefield. One of the most moving experiences of my life was the opportunity to visit the hospital at Camp Bastion. It is a most amazing institution. The whole question of service families has been referred to several times. Families matter most to their members and therefore it is essential that things like housing, education and facilities for children are fully taken care of. Then, as is the case for anyone, there is the need for decent career prospects, which all too often are not taken into account.

I am afraid that there has been a lack of understanding of the Armed Forces at the highest levels of the Civil Service, particularly in the Cabinet Office, the Treasury and even the MoD. The Treasury seems to see the Armed Forces as a sponge to be squeezed. That is not a good attitude to take towards the Armed Forces, and we have been given some examples today of the attempts to squeeze the sponge. Part of the reason for this is the fact that probably no one in the Civil Service today has ever served in any of the forces. After all, National Service ended some 50 years ago in, I think, December 1960. Indeed, relatively few people in the other place have ever served, but there are some, including some very distinguished ones. It is particularly lucky that in the Ministry of Defence we have several Ministers who have served in Her Majesty’s Forces. If we accept that there is a lack of understanding, experience and sympathy at the top of the Civil Service, it is absolutely crucial that our political leaders make up for it and ensure that what we call the military covenant is honoured.

It is crucial that the three service chiefs and the Chief of the Defence Staff continue to have direct access to the Prime Minister. That itself is part of the military covenant. If the covenant is not maintained, the supply of first-class people for our Armed Forces will diminish. That will be a betrayal of the crucial obligation of any Government: the defence of the realm.

5.14 pm

Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank: My Lords, first, I declare two interests. I am president of the Army Benevolent Fund and colonel of a regiment, the Life Guards, which is currently serving in Afghanistan. Secondly, like other noble Lords, I thank the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield for introducing this extremely important debate.

I am delighted that the Government are addressing seriously this very important subject, with the Prime Minister inviting Professor Hew Strachan to produce a report. Charities such as the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes, SSAFA, the Army Benevolent Fund and many others have made very helpful contributions to the debate. By supporting the concept of a military covenant, much has been achieved by both the present and the previous Governments, particularly in the medical field; for example, treatment of the wounded at Selly Oak and Headley Court.

However, the Government need to realise just how difficult it will be to honour the covenant without continuous commitment to it. The need for that commitment is unlikely to go away in any of our lifetimes. The services have suffered for years from

[LORD GUTHRIE OF CRAIGIEBANK]

financial neglect. Other great departments of state have core budgets which increase greatly—for example, the Department of Health, the Department for Education and DfID—but not the Ministry of Defence, which for long periods has been taken for granted. The quality of life of service men and women has deteriorated. I hope that it is realised that great dangers are being run. Those in the services understand that defence has to accept a share of the pain in order to pay off the debt facing the country. However, the aggregate of what people are facing in terms of allowances, together with decreasing promotion opportunities, is making high-quality service men and women think very hard about their futures.

The last three commanding officers of 22 SAS, a regiment of which I have just ceased being colonel, have either left or are leaving the Army. They are worried about the future and the future of their families. The Army needs to hang on to such quality. I could give your Lordships other examples. Allowances are being changed. Soldiers largely accept this, but what really concerns them is the logic used to justify it. It is couched in terms that do not recognise the demands of military life. Continuity of education allowances is an example. They are not just a perk for officers; they affect all ranks. More stability may be promised, but if people want to be promoted, they will have to move to gain experience. If they do not do that, the services will be worse off.

Many service men and women are now worried about their pensions. They feel that the unique requirements of the Armed Forces are not being recognised in the review of public sector pensions. I suspect that one of the reasons that we are in this predicament is that the Ministry of Defence, although proclaiming the importance of people, does not always reflect that when allocating the defence budget. Accommodation, barracks, married quarters, education, pay and conditions of service have suffered when compared with expensive equipment programmes. When savings have to be made and made too quickly, too often the only way to get the money is to look at the MoD estates, people and conditions. Too often, unlike people, the equipment projects are protected by contracts, and I think that we have the balance rather wrong.

In sum, I hope that the Government realise just how difficult it will be to honour the covenant. Too many service men and women feel that the MoD, the Treasury and other departments of state and political leaders of all parties do not really understand the difference between the military and civilian life and that those who serve the Crown are not foremost in their thinking. The Government must acknowledge how serious the situation is today and must remain committed. If they do not remain committed, the services, which are almost on the point of haemorrhaging, will haemorrhage quickly, and we will damage one of the great departments and institutions of state.

5.21 pm

Lord Rosser: My Lords, I add my congratulations to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield on securing this debate. He is an expert on the meaning

and purpose of covenants, since the idea of a covenant comes from scripture and is used in the *Old Testament* to describe the relationship that God has with his chosen people. A covenant is a mutual relationship of obligation and care; both sides promise to look out for the other and, in return, both sides can count on each other, too. That in essence is what the military covenant is about: a covenant between the Government, the nation and its Armed Forces. We had a debate earlier today about the physical and mental rehabilitation of military veterans, including our responsibilities to them under the military covenant.

We have the covenant for a number of reasons, not least because we recognise the role and duties of the Armed Forces in defence of the state and that carrying out such duties can result in serious injury or death in action for service personnel. We recognise their commitment and their courage and their devotion to duty and, as part of that, we recognise that we have a responsibility to support them and care for them and their immediate dependants during and after service.

The military covenant is a subject on which the Government have expressed some very firm views. Towards the end of last year, the Secretary of State for Defence said that he would,

“rebuild the Military Covenant left shattered by Labour”—

a clear indication that at times, at least, that gentleman is not enamoured of the idea of maximising the extent to which a bipartisan approach to defence can be secured. He set up a task force to find,

“low cost, innovative policy ideas”.

It reported recently, and the Secretary of State committed to taking forward two recommendations. The first was an Armed Forces community covenant, encouraging volunteers to support their local forces, and the second a commendation scheme, thanking individuals or bodies who give support to the forces. The chairman of the Forces Pension Society described the task force proposals as, “incredibly wet and feeble”, and added:

“If this is all the Government can offer to rebuild the covenant, we have a long battle ahead”.

The Government have not yet given their response to all the task force proposals, and perhaps the Minister will be able to update us on that point and on the work being undertaken on the military covenant by the Ministry of Defence.

The Government plan to publish an annual Armed Forces covenant report which, if it is going to continue the previous Government’s plans, will provide an annual assessment of the Government’s progress in implementing commitments to strengthen the covenant. Perhaps the Minister could confirm that that is an issue that the Government’s proposed annual Armed Forces covenant report will address.

One of the innovations we introduced in 2008 was the impartial oversight of the Government’s progress at strengthening the military covenant. The External Reference Group, as the right reverend Prelate said when opening this debate, was set up as an independent monitor to be a check on the Government’s implementation of the service personnel Command Paper, the first cross-government strategy on the welfare of Armed Forces personnel, which incorporated some significant improvements. It is essential that such reports

are independent, expert-led and above politics. The Royal British Legion has raised concerns about this issue. Can the Minister say who will be doing any scrutiny and assessment and producing the annual forces covenant report? What issues and subjects will be covered in that report? Will it be undertaken by independent people or will it be a report by Ministers? What will be the future role of the External Reference Group?

When in Opposition in 2009, the now Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, said that,

“the Government must look at issues of housing, healthcare and veterans’ welfare if it ... wants to avert a serious crisis in recruitment and retention”.

These are obviously matters that would come within the ambit of the covenant. Can the Minister say when they intend to build on the improvements the previous Government made to service accommodation in the light of the strategic defence and security review, which appears to indicate that cost of accommodation is a target area for savings?

The Government have been criticised for their intention to scrap major reforms to the system of inquests into military deaths. The changes we legislated to introduce and were due to be implemented imminently were supported by service charities and families. The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 would have delivered a better inquest service and ensured that the coroner undertaking military inquests had the training necessary to conduct an effective investigation. It would also have created a system of appeals against a coroner’s decisions. This has now been undone by the Government’s intention to scrap the office of the chief coroner and abandon the reforms that families want. In view of the vote in your Lordships’ House to save the office of the chief coroner, can the Minister tell the House whether the Government will now accept the outcome of that vote in the light of their commitment to the military covenant.

Then there is the issue of pensions. The Government plan to link public sector pension increases to the consumer prices index, rather than the retail prices index. This will result in lower pension increases than people had previously anticipated and expected and will disproportionately affect members of the Armed Forces and their dependants who rely on their pensions at earlier ages than almost anyone else. The reduction over the years in the anticipated and expected level of pension payment to some individuals, including seriously injured service personnel and Afghanistan war widows, will run into hundreds of thousands of pounds as their anticipated pensions are reduced for the rest of their working lives. When challenged on this last November, a Ministry of Defence spokesman said:

“It is not possible to treat the armed forces differently from other public servants”.

Can the Minister say whether that statement represents his view and that of his defence ministerial colleagues? Is such a statement consistent with the intention and meaning of the military covenant?

At the time your Lordships House debated the strategic defence and security review, there were reservations, in some cases strong reservations, about some of the decisions that were part of that review. The Minister prayed in aid the Government’s analysis

of the financial situation, and will perhaps do so again today. No doubt, that is the Government’s justification for their approach to Armed Forces pay, which is hardly designed to improve morale. For a military covenant to have credibility among and within the Armed Forces, it is imperative that the Armed Forces are provided with the resources to undertake the commitments, clearly defined and with clear objectives, that they are expected to carry out and meet, and are not expected to undertake commitments which cannot be, for whatever reason, properly resourced. That relates not just to equipment and manpower, but to the welfare of service personnel and their families, given that that also helps to maintain morale and ensure operational effectiveness.

I do not doubt for one moment the personal commitment of the Minister to the military covenant or his own determination and, I am sure the determination of his defence ministerial colleagues, to try to ensure that the commitments our Armed Forces are expected to undertake are clearly defined and continue to be backed up by the level of resources needed to show that the military covenant is a meaningful and credible covenant which reflects the admiration and esteem that the people of this country feel for our service personnel.

5.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Hever): My Lords, I, too, congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield on securing this important debate on the military covenant. In addition to the excellent debate that we had earlier today in the name of my noble friend Lord King, we had a debate on 12 November on the SDSR. As I said then,

“the SDSR is the start, not the end, of a process that will give us the Armed Forces that we need to face the challenges of the future while meeting the demands of today”.—[*Official Report*, 12/11/10; col. 393.]

The SDSR was the first review in 12 years and the first specifically to incorporate a security dimension—an acknowledgement that today defence and security are indivisible.

In setting out our defence and security strategy for the coming years, our overwhelming priority was to ensure operational success in Afghanistan, not least by giving our Armed Forces, who continue to deploy so courageously, all necessary resources. In addition, we had to work within the constraints of the biggest financial crisis in a generation and to reach our conclusions without damaging essential capability, the military covenant or critical industrial capability.

We recognise the need to do more to ensure that our Armed Forces veterans and their families have the support that they need and are treated with the dignity that they deserve. Members of our Armed Forces are second to none. They willingly accept the sacrifices that they may be called on to make. They enter into a lifestyle that can, at times, prevent them from enjoying aspects of life that many of us take for granted. That sacrifice is also borne by their families.

The military covenant originally set down the mutual obligations that exist between the nation, the Army and each individual soldier in recognition of the

[LORD ASTOR OF HEVER]

extraordinary commitment and sacrifice that soldiers may be called on to make, including the ultimate sacrifice. Those soldiers and their families should expect to be treated fairly and to be valued and respected. This debt of honour enshrined in the military covenant is something that I am sure noble Lords and noble and gallant Lords would acknowledge. While we were in opposition, however, we felt that the covenant was beginning to fracture. Consequently, the Government are rewriting the covenant as a tri-service document, the Armed Forces covenant, which expresses the enduring general principles that should govern the relationship between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community.

The Armed Forces covenant will provide a framework for government policy that aims to improve the support available for serving and former members of the Armed Forces and the families who carry so much of the burden, especially in the event of injury or death. The Armed Forces Bill currently going through the other place contains a clause requiring the Secretary of State for Defence to present an Armed Forces covenant report to Parliament every year. That requirement for an annual report will be enshrined in law and the report will play a crucial part in holding the Government to account to ensure that they are honouring the covenant.

One of the first things that the coalition Government did was to set out a number of concrete measures to rebuild the covenant. The programme for government described a number of measures that are designed to rebuild the covenant. They range from support for the education of service personnel to increasing support to veterans' mental health needs. We have already doubled the operation allowance and changed the rest and recuperation arrangements. It is right that we properly support the families of those who have sacrificed or are prepared to sacrifice so much. In December last year we announced details of a new scheme to provide further and higher education scholarships for the children of service personnel killed on active duty. The scholarship will meet the cost of tuition fees and living expenses. Nothing can make up for the loss of a parent, but we hope that the scheme can in some way demonstrate the overwhelming gratitude of the nation for the sacrifices that some of our service families have made.

We also believe that it is important to support our service leavers as they transition to civilian lives, and that we should do all we can to help to make that transition successfully. In December, for example, we announced enhancements to the scheme that enables service leavers to go to university. Investing in their education is an investment in this country's future prosperity, so we are reducing the qualifying period from six years to four and removing the qualifying period completely for personnel who are medically discharged.

In England we have announced the introduction of a pupil premium within state schools. This additional funding aims to enable schools to provide the extra support needed to mitigate the effects of frequent changes of school and the effects of separation from a serving parent deployed on operations.

In addition to the measures within the programme for government, the Prime Minister ordered the creation of a covenant task force under Professor Strachan. Its remit was to develop a series of low-cost policy ideas to help rebuild the military covenant, focusing particularly on ways of involving charities, private companies and civil society. Professor Strachan's report was published on 8 December and we immediately accepted two of its recommendations: the community covenant, which aims to encourage support locally for the Armed Forces community; and the Chief of the Defence Staff commendation, which aims to recognise those who have shown support and assisted our Armed Forces in many different ways. We aim to launch both of these schemes in the spring. We are now consulting across Government and with other stakeholders on the report, and will issue a full government response commenting on each of the 90-plus recommendations, also in the spring.

We are committed to meeting the mental health needs of our people. Last year we accepted all the valuable recommendations in my honourable friend Dr Andrew Murrison's excellent report, *Fighting Fit: A Mental Health Plan for Servicemen and Veterans*. The report focuses on improving the identification of mental health problems and better outreach, assessment and information services. It sets out 13 recommendations to encourage engagement with serving and former service personnel with mental health problems. We are now working hard to bring all these improvements together in one overarching strategy.

Stability and mobility are often competing forces in service life. We believe that we can better organise our Armed Forces to provide greater stability and minimise the mobile nature of the role that is so often the root cause of many of the difficulties that our Armed Forces families are faced with. Financial pressures are making it difficult for us to do as much as we would like to improve the accommodation that we currently provide for service families, but I am pleased to say that work started in December on a project to provide 260 new high-quality sustainable homes for soldiers and their families on the Canadian estate at Bulford, near Salisbury.

I turn to questions that I received. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Wakefield asked about the timetable for the development of a new employment model. This is a project aimed at the long term. Work is now getting under way but it cannot be implemented immediately. The study will be conducted over the next 12 to 18 months. Timelines for implementation will be devised following the concept phase. The new employment model project will review current terms and conditions of service and make changes where appropriate, to bring the expectations of service personnel and the demands we place on them more into line. At the heart of the new employment model is a recognition that, where mobility is required for service reasons, appropriate support and compensation must be available.

I assure the right reverend Prelate that it is not our intention to phase out the external reference group. We will continue to call upon and welcome the input of the external reference group, which brings together representatives from across Whitehall, the key service

charities, the three families federations and academia, and delivers an independent judgment on the Government's efforts in supporting the Armed Forces community. Indeed, we were able to offer reassurances to the group when it met last week.

My noble friend Lord Glenarthur asked three questions, the first of which was about ID cards. Many reservists already have a permanent ID card. I am looking into the issue and will write to my noble friend as soon as possible. I will also write to him in response to his question on medical information being passed to reservists' GPs. On support to employers, the MoD aims to build support from employers of members of the volunteer Reserve Forces through its SaBRE campaign. We run a website and a free phone support line to communicate the benefits associated with employing a reservist.

My noble friend Lord Lee asked about the return from Germany. As announced by the Prime Minister, as part of the strategic defence and security review the Government have decided to accelerate the rebasing of 20,000 military personnel in Germany with a view to returning half of them by 2015 and the remainder by 2020. Work is ongoing to look at how best we do that.

The noble Lord, Lord Ramsbotham, made a point about the Veterans Minister. We absolutely accept that we must work across government to best support veterans and I pay tribute to the work done by the previous Government to improve that. We must now take that further. The question is whether simply moving the location of the Veterans Minister would be the best way to achieve that.

A number of noble Lords, including my noble friend Lord Lee of Trafford, the noble Lords, Lord Ramsbotham and Lord Bilimoria, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Hereford and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Guthrie, mentioned allowances. I am well aware of the strong feeling on that issue and know how seriously my right honourable friend the Prime Minister takes the covenant. A strong economy is a national security imperative. The Government conducted the SDSR against the background of the dire fiscal situation, which requires difficult decisions on reducing public spending. Proper support to our service personnel is equally essential. An appropriate set of allowances is an important element of that support and will remain so in future. However, it cannot be immune from careful scrutiny to ensure that it remains appropriate. While reductions in that area will never be welcome, the package of changes that we are introducing has been developed in full consultation with the service Chiefs of Staff and represents the best balance between affordability and fairness.

I have run out of time. I will write to the noble Lords who asked me other questions. Again, I am most grateful to the right reverend Prelate for giving us the opportunity to discuss these important issues today. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that our Armed Forces have the support that they need and are duly recognised for the important role that they fulfil and the sacrifice that they make in the defence of the nation. Neither they nor the nation should expect anything less.

House adjourned at 5.42 pm.

Written Statements

Thursday 27 January 2011

Crime: Forensic Science

Statement

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Neville-Jones): My honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Prevention (James Brokenshire) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

I am today announcing a review, led by the Home Office chief scientific adviser, Professor Bernard Silverman, of research and development in forensic science.

Research and development in forensic science is essential to ensure the continued availability of a high-quality, efficient, forensic science capability for the criminal justice system.

The purpose of the review is to consider the current and likely future status of research and development relevant to forensic services for the criminal justice system within England and Wales. The scope will include, but not be limited to, fingerprints, DNA profiling, digital forensics (e-forensics) and more specialist aspects of forensic science.

The review will consult widely with forensic service providers and related organisations in the public and private sectors, academia and research funders, as well as issuing an open call for submissions of evidence. The review will also work closely with the National Policing Improvement Agency and police service customers. It is expected that the review will conclude in April 2011.

The full terms of reference for the review will be published on the Home Office website today and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Data Protection Legislative Framework

Statement

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord McNally): My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Justice (Kenneth Clarke) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

Tomorrow, I will publish the Government's response to the call for evidence on current data protection law which was held between July and October 2010.

The call for evidence sought evidence about areas of the European data protection directive 95/46/EC and the Data Protection Act 1998 that may be out of date or could be improved, and also those areas that are working well and should be retained. Over 160 responses were received from across the public, private and third sectors, consumer groups and members of the public. The evidence received will help to inform the UK's position for the forthcoming negotiations on a new comprehensive EU instrument for data protection. A proposal for this instrument is expected from the European Commission in mid-2011.

At the same time as publishing this response, the Government will publish a post-implementation review impact assessment of the Data Protection Act 1998, having received comments on the provisional document published alongside the call for evidence. The post-implementation review primarily aimed to assess the costs and benefits the Act has generated, but findings from the review will also contribute to the UK's evidence base for negotiations on a revised EU legal instrument.

Copies of the response to the call for evidence paper and the post-implementation review impact assessment will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and on the department's website at www.justice.gov.uk.

ECOFIN

Statement

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Sassoon): My right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer (George Osborne) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

The Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Brussels on 18 January 2011. The following items were discussed:

Presentation of the Presidency Work Programme

Hungarian Finance Minister Matolcsy presented the presidency work programme for ECOFIN for the first half of 2011. He identified his main priorities as the European semester, economic governance, financial services and the creation of the European stability mechanism.

Communication from the Commission: Towards a Single Market Act

The council held an exchange of views on the Single Market Act which was published on 27 October 2010 and is out for consultation until 28 February 2011. Ministers had a positive discussion and agreed that it would be important for ECOFIN to continue to engage on those issues that are led by Finance Ministers. The Government support the single market and believe that future reforms should be strongly focused on measures which encourage growth. The council agreed to re-examine the issue in due course.

Follow-up to the December European Council meeting

The council took note of the presidency's plans for the follow-up to the European Council's meeting on 16 and 17 December which called for work on legislative proposals aimed at strengthening EU economic governance to be accelerated, so that they can be adopted by June this year.

Annual Growth Survey

The council held an exchange of views on a presentation by the Commission, which covered the main elements of its annual growth survey published on 12 January. The adoption by the European Commission of the annual growth survey will mark the beginning of the first cycle of the European semester. The Government are content with the Commission's focus on growth, in line with objectives for the single market. ECOFIN will agree council conclusions on this in February.

Review of Draft National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

Ministers discussed a review of member states' draft national reform programmes (NRPs) which set out member states' reform priorities and plans. The Government are content with the Commission's positive assessment of the UK draft NRPs and believes that the focus of all member states' NRPs should be on tackling bottlenecks to growth. In March the Spring European Council will provide guidance to member states for finalisation of their stability and convergence programmes (budgetary policies) and national reform programmes (structural reforms). Full NRPs are due in April.

Implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact

The council concluded that action by Malta to reduce its excessive deficit represented adequate progress.

Introduction of the Euro in Estonia: Practical Experience

The presidency noted that the introduction of the euro in Estonia had gone very smoothly, and warm congratulations were extended.

Employment: Workplace Disputes Reforms

Statement

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Baroness Wilcox):

My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

Today the Government have announced the next steps in our comprehensive review of employment laws. We have launched a consultation on proposals to improve the way workplace disputes are resolved and published an "employer's charter" to give employers more confidence to take on workers and support growth.

In the consultation we are seeking views on measures to achieve more early resolution of workplace disputes so that parties can resolve their own problems, in a way that is fair and equitable for both sides, without having to go to an employment tribunal; ensure that, where parties do need to come to an employment tribunal, the process is as swift, user-friendly and effective as possible; and help business feel more confident about hiring people (by increasing the qualifying period for employees to be able to bring a claim for unfair dismissal from one to two years).

The employer's charter tackles the myth that employment protections are all one-way—towards the employee. It clearly sets out the most important rights that employers already have in the workplace.

The consultation will close after 12 weeks on 20 April 2011. During the consultation period we will seek views from a range of interested parties. Following consideration of the responses to the consultation, we will publish a government response, setting out what we intend to take forward.

Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Libraries of the Houses.

EU: General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils

Statement

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): My right honourable friend the Minister for Europe (David Lidington) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

The Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council will meet in Brussels on 31 January. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary (William Hague) will attend the Foreign Affairs Council. I will attend the General Affairs Council.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (GAC)

Hungarian Presidency

The Hungarian Foreign Minister will formally introduce Hungary's presidency priorities (see link below). Hungary intends to focus on three economic issues: the need to conclude discussions regarding the design of the new European stability mechanism; the need to reach a general approach on the economic governance package; and to reach final agreement on EU2020. Other topics expected to be highlighted include pushing for a Commission strategy on Roma; beginning discussions on the Danube strategy; working towards entry into Schengen by Bulgaria and Romania; enlargement; and creating concrete projects to promote the eastern partnership. www.eu2011.hu/priorities-hungarian-presidency

Follow-up to the December European Council and Preparations for the February European Council

The presidency has invited the President of the Council, Herman Van Rompuy, to discuss preparations for the European Council of 4 February. The February European Council agenda covers energy and innovation. Discussions should focus on the Energy 2020 strategy (further detail below) and how to increase levels of innovation in the private sector. There may also be some discussion of economic governance and the European stabilisation mechanism, although they are not officially on the February European Council agenda.

More information on this meeting, and other EU meetings this month, can be found at: www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/fc/118910.pdf

Details about the Energy 2020 strategy can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/publications/doc/2011_energy2020_en.pdf.

European Semester: Annual Growth Survey

Ministers will consider the European semester. The European semester will put EU and member state discussions of economic priorities and structural reforms on a common timetable. There will also be a presentation by the presidency of the annual growth survey (AGS), which covers key economic themes for the EU and national action over 2011 and identifies priorities to tackle. There will not be conclusions on the AGS, as the main work will be carried out by other council formations: namely ECOFIN and EPSCO. We broadly support the focus on growth. Alongside fiscal consolidation and a more competitive financial sector, a comprehensive structural reform programme will be essential to improving competitiveness.

Roma

The presidency is expected to initiate a procedural discussion on future work on the Roma ahead of an April Commission presentation of a framework strategy on Roma inclusion. The Government support this discussion and work in the EU to share best practice and assist member states in promoting Roma inclusion. However, we are also clear that primary responsibility for the Roma lies with member states and that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Danube Region Strategy

The Danube region strategy is a complex sustainable development strategy for the regions in the catchment area of the Danube river. It covers: transport/economic/industrial issues; environmental/food supply; and cultural/heritage/education. The UK broadly welcomes the strategy, although a full evaluation of the projects is needed.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (FAC)

Sudan

We expect conclusions welcoming the timely, credible and peaceful conduct of the Southern Sudan referendum as a crucial step in implementing the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA). The conclusions should also look forward to the publication of the results of the referendum, and emphasise the need for resolution of the remaining CPA issues.

On Darfur, we believe that the conclusions should express concern about the increasing violence and poor security situation in Darfur, and the need for genuine engagement by all parties in the peace process. We support proposals for a Darfur-based political process when the conditions are right, and which complement the ongoing Doha process.

Lebanon

Ministers will discuss latest developments in Lebanon following the collapse of the Lebanese Government. The EU's support for the special tribunal in Lebanon was most recently expressed in the November 2010 conclusions (see link below). At this stage, new conclusions are not expected, though the position could change depending on events on the ground. www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/117948.pdf

Côte d'Ivoire

We expect conclusions expressing concern over the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. We would like the conclusions to call for the peaceful and swift transfer of power from the former President Gbagbo to the elected President Ouattara and to reiterate our support for the robust stance taken by ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) and the African Union in upholding democracy in the region and throughout the continent. Ministers may also discuss EU support to UNOCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) and African initiatives to facilitate reconciliation.

Sahel

The EU Sahel strategy is currently being developed by the European External Action Service in conjunction with the EU Commission. We are supportive of this strategy in principle; a comprehensive EU approach

on security and development strands in the Sahel is worth while, as underlined by the kidnap and murder of two French nationals in Niamey on 7 and 8 January. However, any UK final support would depend on a detailed analysis of the strategy—which we have not yet seen in full—and its resource implications.

Freedom of Religion

In response to the recent attacks against religious communities in a number of countries, we expect conclusions to be adopted on the issue of "Intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief". We believe these conclusions should send a strong statement of the council's condemnation of these events and its commitment to upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief. We also believe that the conclusions should signal the European Union's determination to promote freedom of religious belief through a clear commitment to undertake further practical measures in this area.

Belarus

We expect conclusions to: reiterate EU statements to date on the flawed December elections; to announce the FAC's decision to impose travel restrictions and asset freezes on those responsible for the fraudulent elections and for the subsequent violent crackdown on the opposition, civil society and representatives of the independent media; and to set out the EU's intention to support the Belarusian people and civil society. The Government's aim is to focus the discussion on the need to develop a coherent, long-term strategy for Belarus. Baroness Ashton made a statement on Belarus to the European Parliament on 19 January: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/11/34&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en>

Strategic Partners

Baroness Ashton is expected to provide a short debrief on her presentation to the December European Council on the EU's relations with its strategic partners, setting out next steps in this work programme.

Russia

We expect Ministers to discuss the formation of a more balanced partnership between the EU and Russia, one which promotes and strengthens mutual prosperity and is underpinned by a legally binding, ambitious new EU-Russia agreement. It is likely that frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Union will be discussed, including the need for pressure on Russia to deliver on Transnistria. Climate change and energy, and rule of law and modernisation in Russia are also likely to be raised. Ministers will address the human rights situation in Russia, following a number of recent, well publicised cases of concern. There will also be discussion of how to deliver progress on the EU-Russia agreement, improve the architecture of EU-Russia co-operation, and improve internal EU working methods on Russia policies.

Additionally, Ministers may reflect on the shocking act of terrorism at Moscow's Domodedovo airport on 24 January. The Foreign Secretary's statement on this can be seen at the link below. www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=539155782

Iran

Baroness Ashton is likely to provide an update on the E3+3 talks with Iran in Istanbul on 21 and 22 January. Due to Iran's insistence on unacceptable pre-conditions, no further talks are scheduled. Following the talks in Istanbul, Baroness Ashton released a statement on behalf of the E3+3 on 21 January: www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118915.pdf

We are also hope there will be a discussion of proposed EU measures to tackle Iran's poor human rights record.

Tunisia

Ministers will discuss EU support for Tunisia following recent events. We expect conclusions to be adopted which call for a stable and inclusive transition to elections as soon as practicable, and restate the EU's support for political and economic reform in Tunisia. The Government consider that free and fair elections, as promised by Tunisia's interim Government, are essential for Tunisia's stability; and we firmly support EU assistance in this area.

Middle East Peace Process

Baroness Ashton will report back from her recent trip to the Middle East (see link), and outline preparations for the 5 February quartet meeting in Munich. We also expect her to update Ministers on progress for proposals to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza that were agreed at the FAC in December 2010. www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118717.pdf

EU: Justice and Home Affairs Council*Statement*

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Neville-Jones): My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department (Theresa May) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

My right honourable friend the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Kenneth Clarke MP) and I attended the Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council on 20 and 21 January in Gödöllo.

Discussions on the interior day centred on two themes: "Internal Security: combining efforts in combating organised crime" and "Comprehensive security through integrated border management".

The Commission opened the item on organised crime by highlighting cybercrime and asset recovery; it felt there was a need to focus on the exchange of best practice. The chair of the European Parliament LIBE Committee suggested that proving the effectiveness of the EU in the security field was one of the biggest challenges for the EU. The Europol director gave a preview of its organised crime threat assessment noting an increasing risk in particular in relation to the infiltration of the legal economy and facilitation of illegal activity by the internet. There was an increasing use of aircraft and helicopters for smuggling of goods, use of minors for petty crime and sexual exploitation, an upsurge in counterfeiting and a largely unnoticed trade in endangered species. Interpol highlighted the

ability of organised crime to destabilise whole countries and gave the example of cocaine trafficking via west Africa.

The UK said that it recognised organised crime as a real threat alongside counterterrorism and would be developing a new strategy. In particular the UK acknowledged cybercrime as requiring particular attention, although it was often old crimes committed by new methods. The UK welcomed practical co-operation, rather than legislation, and agreed with the presidency that we needed to look imaginatively at ways of tackling crime, including seizure of assets. Most member states thought further work on asset freezing, confiscation and sharing was a priority and welcomed the Commission's commitment to bring forward a report on the issues in the second half of 2011.

The Commission opened the second session by highlighting action it was taking. It would forward a border package over the next year, including looking at an EU Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) and a proposal on a European border surveillance system (EUROSUR). It also saw a need to finalise discussion on the new FRONTEX regulation and to reform the Schengen evaluation mechanism. FRONTEX, the EU's external borders agency, felt that priorities were better interagency co-operation, situational awareness and targeted co-operation at the border. FRONTEX also needed to be able to do more on capacity building and returns with third countries.

The UK stated that it was correct to focus on integrated management of the border and supported the Greek action plan, which was critical to the EU's collective success. For the UK, modern technologies were a key part of a 21st-century response to maintain border security while facilitating legitimate travel. For that reason the UK supported the philosophy behind EU proposals for registered travellers and an entry-exit scheme and, given our experience, the introduction of biometric visas. We were concerned about the UK's exclusion from the proposal for the Schengen evaluation mechanism. The e-Borders system allowed the UK to focus resources and evidence suggested that intra-EU flights were important and it was hoped that would be covered by the new EU passenger name records measure. In subsequent discussion many member states highlighted the use of technology as important and in particular interoperability of technologies. Many welcomed the Commission proposals for amendment to the Schengen evaluation mechanism and thought that greater use needed to be made of FRONTEX.

The justice day began with a discussion on a communication published by the Commission entitled *EU Citizenship: How to Dismantle the Obstacles to EU Citizens' Rights*. This sets out what the Commission considers to be the obstacles EU citizens face when trying to exercise their rights across national borders and suggests actions to tackle them. Among other things, the presidency invited discussion about whether the Justice and Home Affairs Council should adopt an oversight role over the actions suggested in the report, but this gained little support. The UK welcomed the overview the Commission report provided and highlighted criminal justice as an area where we needed absolute confidence in others' systems. The UK suggested that

the Commission should also focus on making it easier for individuals and businesses to enforce civil debts across borders.

Ministers were also asked what they considered to be the key elements of the proposal on succession and wills in simplifying citizens' rights. This gave rise to a substantial debate. The UK reiterated its concerns with this proposal.

Over lunch, the presidency held a discussion on the role of the council in ensuring the effective implementation of the charter of fundamental rights in the legislative process. Its paper raised the question whether there was a need for further council processes to verify member states' compliance with the charter. The UK, together with a number of other member states, questioned whether there was sufficient support for the presidency's proposal to be taken forward.

Next, there was a discussion on "Judicial training: how to improve training of legal professionals in the EU". The Stockholm programme stressed the importance of judicial training and the Commission has committed to producing a communication on training of legal practitioners in September 2011. The majority of member states, including the UK, did not favour creation of a new training institution, preferring to build on existing structures including the European Judicial Training Network. The UK welcomed the intention of improving judges' knowledge of EU law and each others' systems and particularly the Commission's recognition that it would have to accommodate very different systems.

Public Forest Estate

Statement

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): My right honourable friend the Secretary of State (Caroline Spelman) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

I have today published a public consultation on the future of the public forest estate in England. A copy of the consultation document is available through the Defra website (www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/index.htm) and the Forestry Commission website (www.forestry.gov.uk/england-pfe-consultation) and I have placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

The public forest estate in England is around 258,000 hectares of government-owned land managed by the Forestry Commission. It represents less than one-fifth of the woodlands of England, with the majority of the remainder in private and voluntary sector ownership. The estate was started at a time of national crisis after the First World War, with severe shortages of timber and a woodland resource depleted to less than 5 per cent of the land area in Great Britain.

In line with the Government's broad policy to effect a shift from big government to big society, the consultation sets out the rationale for reducing state ownership and management of forest resources. The status quo is not an option. There is a fundamental conflict of interest in the Forestry Commission's role. It is the largest player in the commercial forestry sector, a sector it also regulates.

The Government's approach to looking at new models of ownership and management of the public forest estate in England will be underpinned by a set of key principles which are designed to protect public access and other public benefits that so many enjoy. The Government's proposals, on which the consultation seeks views, are for a mixed approach which includes:

Recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the different types of woodland and forestry;

Inviting new or existing charitable organisations to take on ownership or management of the heritage forests in order to secure their public benefits for future generations to enjoy;

Creating opportunities for community and civil society groups to buy or lease forests that they wish to own or manage; and

Issuing long-term leases on the large-scale commercially valuable forests. By leasing rather than selling, it will be possible to ensure that the public can continue to enjoy their benefits.

The Government are committed to the ongoing provision and protection of the public benefits provided by the public forest estate. The policy we are consulting on shows how we intend to achieve this. We will ensure that the powers in the Public Bodies Bill reflect our policy objectives, so that the powers and duties within it are strengthened to safeguard the natural and social capital our forests provide now and for future generations. This would apply to the powers of sale, lease and management of the public forest estate. The consultation proposes that conditions will be attached to leases so that access and other public benefits are protected. We will consider:

introducing a general duty on the Government to have regard to the maintenance of public benefits when exercising the powers under the Bill;

exempting the most iconic heritage forests from the full range of options so that for example, the Forest of Dean or the New Forest could only be transferred to a charitable organisation or remain in public ownership, in line with the policy as set out in the consultation.

The Forestry Commission will play an important role in supporting the wider forestry sector—through its regulatory, grant-giving, research and expert advisory roles—to provide a wide range of public benefits.

The consultation relates to 85 per cent of the public forest estate. The remaining 15 per cent is covered by the spending review settlement, announced in October 2010.

I am today publishing tightened criteria for those sales under the Forestry Commission's programme to deliver £100 million in gross receipts during 2011-15. During 2010, the Forestry Commission's asset disposal programme continued under criteria established by the previous Administration. At the end of 2010, pending review of the sales criteria, Ministers withdrew some sites from sale. The new criteria have been amended to strengthen the protection of public benefits through the withdrawal from sale of woodlands with significant areas of unrestored plantations on ancient woodland sites.

Written Answers

Thursday 27 January 2011

Agriculture: Hill Farm Allowance

Questions

Asked by **Baroness Quin**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the most recent figures for the number of farmers participating in (a) the Entry Level Environmental Stewardship scheme, and (b) the Higher Level scheme; and what percentage of the total number of farmers those figures represent. [HL5998]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley):

(a) As at 4 January 2011 there were 41,017 participants in Entry Level Stewardship.

(b) As at the same date, there were 6,859 participants in Higher Level Stewardship. (The majority of these will be underpinned by an Entry Level Stewardship agreement.)

This represents around 39 per cent of the total number of farmers who have currently applied under the Single Payment Scheme.

Participants in all our agri-environment schemes, which include Entry and Higher Level Stewardship, total nearly 57,000, which represents 54 per cent of the total number of farmers who have currently applied under the Single Payment Scheme.

Asked by **Baroness Quin**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have specific targets for take up by farmers of the Entry Level and Higher Level of Environmental Stewardship schemes. [HL5999]

Lord Henley: Natural England, which delivers agri-environment schemes for Defra, has a corporate plan target for uptake of all agri-environment schemes, including Entry and Higher Level Environmental Stewardship, of 70 per cent of available agricultural land in England by March 2011.

Higher Level Stewardship is a competitive scheme targeted to producing greater, but often locally specific outcomes. It does not have a specific area/uptake target.

Animal Health

Questions

Asked by **The Duke of Montrose**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they propose to take forward the recommendation of the England Advisory Group on Responsibility and Cost Sharing on animal health (the Radcliffe report) that there should be an England partnership board within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to identify and implement cost sharing where practical. [HL5986]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): Ministers are still considering the advisory group's recommendations. An announcement will be made by April 2011 as committed to in the structural reform plan.

Asked by **The Duke of Montrose**

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they expect the feasibility study commissioned by the European Commission on possible measures for a Cost Responsibility Sharing Scheme for animal health in Europe to be published. [HL5987]

Lord Henley: The European Commission expects the contractors to complete the feasibility study by the end of April 2011. They have yet to agree a timetable for publication of the final report.

Armed Forces: Retired Officers

Question

Asked by **Lord Marlesford**

To ask Her Majesty's Government on what date the decision to give priority to applicants from the civil service over retired officers for appointment as regimental secretaries was made; whether the decision has been endorsed by ministers; and whether serving civil servants have priority over serving officers. [HL5844]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver): Restrictions on external recruitment to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) have been in place since November 2009. This was approved by Ministers as part of a range of savings measures.

As civilian military support function posts, vacancies for Regimental Secretary appointments are not filled by serving members of the Armed Forces. However, the MoD is pursuing a waiver which, if approved, would allow external applicants to be considered at the same recruiting stage as those within the civil service.

Armed Forces: Trident

Question

Asked by **Lord Dykes**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to publish the long term cost estimates of the proposed Trident missile replacement. [HL6012]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver): There are no plans yet to develop a replacement to the Trident D5 missile, which we expect to remain in service until the 2040s, and we do not anticipate decisions on a D5 replacement being required during the life of this Parliament. There is therefore no further long-term estimate of the potential cost of a replacement missile beyond that published in

the 2006 White Paper (CM6994) *The Future of the UK's Nuclear Deterrent*. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Audit Commission

Question

Asked by **Lord Beecham**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to introduce legislation to abolish the Audit Commission; and when it is anticipated that the abolition will take effect. [HL5595]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Hanham):

A first consultation on the details of a new audit framework is planned for early in 2011, and the Government envisage that it may subsequently publish a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny, ahead of the final introduction of legislation to Parliament. Following such consultation and scrutiny it is the Government's intention to introduce the necessary legislation at the earliest opportunity.

The Government have stated that reforms to the local audit regime are likely to take effect from 2012-13. However, it will take account of the responses to the planned consultation on the new local audit framework and will review the implementation timetable in the light of these views.

Banking

Question

Asked by **Lord Myners**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effects on bank profits of quantitative easing; and whether they have made bank remuneration committees aware of that effect. [HL6024]

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Sassoon): The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Bank of England holds operational responsibility for conducting the asset purchase facility (APF), which includes quantitative easing.

The overall aim of quantitative easing (QE) was to avoid the substantial risk that inflation would undershoot the target in the medium term. The Bank of England has published several assessments of the channels through which QE is expected to work, such as the *Quantitative Easing Explained*. These can be found on the Bank of England website Bank of England\Monetary Policy\Quantitative Easing Explained\Impact of Asset Purchases.

Banks

Question

Asked by **Lord Myners**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what meetings were held by Ministers with chairmen and members of the remuneration committees of major United Kingdom banks in the last three months. [HL5931]

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Sassoon): Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and

private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery. It is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings.

The Government are in discussion with the banks to see whether a new settlement can be reached whereby smaller bonuses are paid than would be paid otherwise and there is greater transparency in relation to remuneration than hitherto. If the banks cannot commit to such a settlement, the Government have made it clear to them that nothing is "off the table", and the Government will keep the both Houses informed of all relevant policy developments

Benefits: Disability

Question

Asked by **Lord Morris of Manchester**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their estimate of the number of chronically sick and disabled persons who will have their income reduced as a consequence of projected cuts in public expenditure. [HL6019]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Lord Freud):

As individual incomes may be affected by a range of policies across government, it is difficult to estimate how many disabled people may be affected by changes in public expenditure.

The spending review 2010 set departmental budgets for each government department up to 2014-15. At the spending review, the Treasury made a qualitative assessment of the likely impact of the spending review on different groups, including disabled people. These assessments were considered when decisions were made. The Treasury published the document, *Overview of Impact of the Spending Review 2010 on Equalities* alongside the spending review announcement.

We have a summary of the changes which affect disabled people on the Department for Work and Pension's website at www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/spending-review-2010.

It is the responsibility of each department to equality impact assess the impact of its policies on protected groups including disabled people, and to make these assessments publicly available at the most appropriate time. DWP policies are still being formulated and equality impact assessments will be published at the appropriate time.

Birds: Farmland Populations

Question

Asked by **The Countess of Mar**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the answers by Lord Henley on 18 January (*HL Deb*, cols 330-2), how they advise landowners to protect farmland birds against predatory mammals and birds that are themselves protected. [HL6143]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley):

Where landowners identify there is a possible predation problem, with protected birds or mammals having a significant impact of farmland bird populations, they are advised to seek the advice of the relevant statutory nature conservation advisers before taking any action. For mammals and birds protected under the Habitats Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, there exist established systems of licensing that in some circumstances allow action to be taken in relation to the control of protected species for the purposes of protecting farmland birds or other species. The statutory nature conservation advisers will be able to advise what action can be taken and under what circumstances.

Many specialists, however, consider that providing habitat of a suitable quality and quantity for declining bird species will have a greater influence in assisting increases in farmland bird populations than tackling predation from mammals and other birds. Indeed adverse predator impacts can often be linked with habitat degradation. For example, prey populations may be particularly threatened by the additional pressure of predation, if their favoured habitats have been poorly managed.

Civil Service Code

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will amend the Civil Service Code to add a prohibition to the section that reads "carry out your fiduciary obligations responsibly (that is make sure public money and other resources are used properly and efficiently)" on not reallocating budget underspends and instead returning slippage money to the Treasury. [HL5891]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: The *Civil Service Code* sets out at a high level the standards of behaviour expected of civil servants. The updated *Civil Service Code* published by the coalition Government in November 2010 included a specific new reference to civil servants' fiduciary obligations as set out in the Cabinet Office structural reform plan, and the requirement on civil servants to make sure public money and other resources are used properly and efficiently is already clearly set out.

Civil Service: Salaries

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many and what proportion of civil servants earn (a) less than the Superannuation Act 2010 (Repeal of Limits on Compensation) Order 2010 minimum annual salary of £23,000, and (b) more than the maximum of £149,820 used for the calculation of redundancy payments; and what were the previous actual and legislatively proposed figures. [HL5643]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: More than 50 per cent of the Civil Service, over 265,000 people, earned less than £23,000 on a full-time equivalent basis on 31 March 2010, the latest date for which figures are available.

Significantly less than 1 per cent, fewer than 150, of the Civil Service, earned more than £149,820 on a full-time equivalent basis on 31 March 2010, the latest date for which figures are available.

Previous arrangements for Civil Service compensation did not provide proportionately greater benefits for the lowest paid or restrict benefits for the highest paid. Therefore there are no previous actual or legislatively proposed figures.

Criminal Justice: Compensation

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will issue a practice direction to criminal courts ensuring judges declare any defendant acquitted at trial, or appellant whose conviction has been quashed as unsafe on appeal, as innocent at the close of the court proceedings; and whether they will ensure that appropriate compensation and aftercare is provided to such persons. [HL6032]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord McNally): Practice directions in the criminal courts are a matter for the Lord Chief Justice, not the Government.

It has long been an important feature of our criminal justice system that a person charged with an offence is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty. A person found not guilty is to be treated as innocent, as too is a person whose conviction has been quashed on appeal.

A person whose conviction is quashed on appeal may apply for compensation under Section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. Entitlement to compensation under that provision will be considered shortly by the Supreme Court in the case of *Adams*.

The Ministry of Justice funds the Miscarriage of Justice Support Service (MJSS) to help those who have had their convictions quashed by the Court of Appeal. The MJSS provides help with issues such as healthcare, accommodation, finance and relationships. The MJSS' funding has recently been extended for a further year to March 2012 and the Ministry of Justice is working with it to improve the support they provide.

Embryology

Question

Asked by **Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Statement by Baroness Thornton on 4 March 2010 (*WS 184*) and the Written Answer by Earl Howe on 13 October 2010 (*WA 74*), whether they consider that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) is "incredibly cheap", as described by the HFEA Chair in the *Guardian* on 11 January. [HL5868]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): The cost effectiveness of a regulator is a relative matter; any judgment should have regard to alternative arrangements that could be made.

As was made clear in the department's review of its arm's-length bodies, Ministers believe that the functions currently performed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority could be performed more cost effectively if transferred and co-ordinated elsewhere.

Employment

Question

Asked by **Lord Dykes**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the prospects for any increase in youth employment in the retail sector in 2011–12.

[HL6011]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Lord Freud): The department does not produce its own labour market forecasts, though for business planning purposes it makes use of projections for jobseeker's allowance volumes that are aligned to the independent claimant count forecast published by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). OBR released its latest forecast on 29 November 2010. This included an assessment of the prospects for overall employment—suggesting a broadly stable picture in 2011 followed by improvement from 2012—but not a breakdown by age group or sector.

Employment: Ex-offenders

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take to encourage businesses to offer work placements, training and jobs to offenders pre- and post-release.

[HL6034]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord McNally): The Government's Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*, published on 7 December, has set out our proposals to engage with employers to work with offenders, and to identify senior business leaders to champion the role employers play in rehabilitating offenders through skills development and work.

This means involving employers in the design of the curriculum for offender learning and skill development, and increasing the number of employers providing work and training in prison, building on the success of workshops run by Cisco, Bovis Lend Lease, Travis Perkins, Timpsons and others. On release from custody, offenders would also be eligible for early entry to the DWP work programme where providers will prepare them for work and link them up with employers. More

generally, we are also looking to increase opportunities for apprenticeships, which enable learning on the job with an employer.

We are consulting with employers about how best to implement these proposals and encourage greater participation from the business sector.

Energy: Fuel Prices

Questions

Asked by **Lord Taylor of Warwick:**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to introduce a fuel price stabiliser.

[HL5907]

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will set a cap on fuel prices.

[HL5993]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to cut tax on petrol.

[HL6205]

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Sassoon): As I noted in the Answer I gave on 24 January, *Official Report*, Col WA 124, the Government asked the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to undertake an assessment of the effect of oil price fluctuations on the public finances. The OBR published its report on 14 September 2010.

The Chancellor keeps all taxes under review. The Government are considering the OBR's assessment as part of the usual Budget process.

Environment

Questions

Asked by **Baroness Parminter**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what were the outcomes of the National Litter Convention.

[HL6215]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): The litter convention brought together over 120 partners from business, local authorities and civil society. Delegates debated the issues, shared examples of best practice and agreed a set of principles in tackling litter. A new initiative on litter, Love Where You Live, was announced. This aims to substantially reduce the amount of litter in England by 2020 and is expected to launch publicly in spring 2011.

Asked by **Baroness Parminter**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with other governments (a) in the European Union, and (b) outside the European Union, about their experiences of deposit refund schemes for drinks containers.

[HL6216]

Lord Henley: There has been no direct contact with other governments but their experiences have been considered as part of our research and that done by other organisations, and through our contact with businesses that operate in countries with deposit systems.

Equality Act 2010

Question

Asked by *Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, with reference to the implementation of the Equality Act 2010, what plans they have to ensure that public bodies do not discriminate against minority groups.

[HL6206]

Baroness Verma: On 12 January 2011 the Government announced that the public sector equality duty, part of the Equality Act 2010, will be commenced on 6 April 2011.

The equality duty consists of a general duty and specific duties.

The general duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;

advance equality of opportunity between people of different groups, and

foster good relations between people from different groups.

The approach of the new equality duty focuses on transparency. Public bodies will be required to set specific, measurable equality objectives and to publish information about their performance on equality so that the public can hold them to account.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is responsible for assessing compliance with and enforcing the equality duty.

EU: Association Agreements

Questions

Asked by *Lord Janner of Braunstone*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent conversations they have held with other European Union member states about using the European Union's Association Agreement with Algeria to encourage it to recognise Israel. [HL6051]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The Government have not had any recent conversations with EU partners on this specific issue. But the EU position is set out clearly in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of December 2010. They noted that: "Peace should lead to the full integration of Israel in its regional environment, along the lines set out in the Arab Peace Initiative".

Asked by *Lord Janner of Braunstone*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent conversations they have held with other European Union member states about using the European Union's Association Agreement with Tunisia to encourage it to recognise Israel. [HL6052]

Lord Howell of Guildford: The Government have not had any recent conversations with EU partners on this specific issue. But the EU position is set out clearly in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of December 2010. They noted that: "Peace should lead to the full integration of Israel in its regional environment, along the lines set out in the Arab Peace Initiative".

EU: Levies

Questions

Asked by *Lord Stoddart of Swindon*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much was levied in penalties by the European Commission on United Kingdom central and local government in 2008–09; and what effect those penalties will have on central and local government services.

[HL6220]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what effect the penalties levied by the European Commission on the United Kingdom in 2008–09 will have on the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Union budget. [HL6221]

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Sassoon): The United Kingdom has never incurred a financial penalty under Article 260 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (or under the former Article 228 (ex Article 171) of the Treaty Establishing the European Community).

EU: UK National Sovereignty

Question

Asked by *Lord Pearson of Rannoch*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Howell of Guildford on 21 December 2010 (*WA 285–7*), which areas of United Kingdom national sovereignty have been ceded since 1972 under the European Treaties to (a) unanimity, and (b) majority voting, in the Council of Ministers; which areas are now shared with the European Parliament; and which remain under the sole control of the United Kingdom Parliament.

[HL5866]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The European Union may only act to the extent that the member states have decided to confer competence on it to do so. The extent of the EU's competences are set out in Articles 3-6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). In respect of these competences, the ordinary legislative procedure, which involves qualified majority voting and co-decision with the European Parliament, is the standard procedure for decision-making unless a special legislative procedure is otherwise specified. Different arrangements apply to the common foreign and security policy where the adoption of legislative acts is excluded.

A list of the articles that outline the areas of competence detailed within the treaties as being subject to unanimity, common accord and consensus is provided at the end of this response.

With the exception of areas where the EU has exclusive competence, even where competence has been conferred on the EU, this does not preclude action by the member states. For example, although the EU has competence to act in the areas of research, technological development and space, the exercise of that competence shall not result in member states being prevented from acting. Furthermore, where under Article 6 TFEU the treaty has conferred competence on the EU to carry out actions to support, co-ordinate or supplement the actions of the member states in certain areas such as education, tourism and civil protection, it does so without superseding member states' competence in these areas.

There are many areas of our national life where the UK remains the final authority, such as the functioning of Parliament itself and the deployment of British Armed Forces.

Articles outlining areas of competence subject to unanimity, consensus or common accord are:

In the Treaty on European Union:

Article 7(2)
 Article 14(2)
 Article 15(4)
 Article 19(2)
 Article 22(1)
 Article 24(1)
 Article 31
 Article 41(2)
 Article 42(2)
 Article 42(4)
 Article 46(6)
 Article 48(3)
 Article 48(4)
 Article 48(6)
 Article 48(7)
 Article 49
 Article 50(3)

In the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union:

Article 19(1)
 Article 21(3)
 Article 25
 Article 48
 Article 64(3)
 Article 65(4)
 Article 68
 Article 77(3)
 Article 81(3) sub-para 1
 Article 81(3) sub-para 2
 Article 82(2)(d)
 Article 83(1) sub-para 3
 Article 86(1)

Article 86(4)
 Article 87(3)
 Article 88(3)
 Article 89
 Article 92
 Article 108(2) sub-para 3
 Article 113
 Article 115
 Article 118 sub-para 2
 Article 121(2)
 Article 126(14)
 Article 127(6)
 Article 140(3)
 Article 148(1)
 Article 153(2)(b) sub-para 4
 Article 153(2)(b) sub-para 3
 Article 155(2) sub-para 2
 Article 192(2) sub-para 1
 Article 192(2) sub-para 2
 Article 194(3)
 Article 203
 Article 207(4) sub-para 2
 Article 207(4) sub-para 3
 Article 215
 Article 218(8) sub-para 2
 Article 219(1)
 Article 22(1)
 Article 22(2)
 Article 222(3)
 Article 223(1) sub-para 2
 Article 223(2)
 Article 244
 Article 246 sub-para 3
 Article 252 sub-para 1
 Article 253 sub-para 1
 Article 254 sub-para 2
 Article 257 sub-para 4
 Article 262
 Article 292
 Article 293(1)
 Article 294(9)
 Article 301 sub-para 2
 Article 305 sub-para 2
 Article 308 sub-para 3
 Article 311 sub-para 3
 Article 312(2) sub-para 1
 Article 312(2) sub-para 2
 Article 329(2) sub-para 2
 Article 331(2)
 Article 332
 Article 333(1)
 Article 333(2)

Article 341
 Article 342
 Article 346(2)
 Article 352(1)
 Article 355(6)

Falkland Islands

Question

Asked by *Lord Berkeley*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Astor of Haver on 10 January (HL5574), (a) what stone-crushing equipment has been shipped to the Falkland islands in the last five years and (1) what maximum-sized stones it could crush and (2) what sizes of aggregates it was capable of producing, (b) what was the unit cost of producing and transporting the aggregates to the Falkland Islands by sea, and (c) whether the stone-crushing equipment transported to the Falkland Islands could have been used to produce aggregates for repairing their runway. [HL5685]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver): The Ministry of Defence (MoD) purchased a Terex Pegson mobile crusher plant in May 2005 and a Terex Powerscreen Chieftain 600 mobile screening plant in December 2007.

The maximum size of stone that can be crushed is 125mm and the resulting aggregates are sized 40mm to dust, 30mm-10mm clean. They are used to produce small volumes of general purpose low-quality aggregate typically used for minor repairs to local stone tracks.

The fine aggregates (sand) were procured from various quarries in the UK at a cost of £58 per tonne as there are no suitable naturally occurring fine aggregates in the Falkland Islands.

The sand was shipped to the Falklands by the Falkland Islands Resupply Service (FIRS). This service is a funded resupply sailing. Loading at Marchwood and discharging at Mare Harbour are both carried out by existing military port operators for which there is no charge.

Coarse aggregates were provided from a local quarry owned by the Falkland Islands Government. The MoD stone crushing equipment was not used to repair the Falkland Islands Runway as it was unable to produce the required volumes, range of sizes and quality of aggregate required for the project.

Flooding: London

Question

Asked by *Lord Kennedy of Southwark*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the flood defences for London. [HL5919]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): The Environment Agency carries out visual condition assessments and detailed engineering assessments of London's tidal flood defences at least twice annually. The Thames Barrier is assessed monthly during a test closure. Our Thames Estuary 2100 plan determines actions necessary to reduce the risk of flooding in London and the Thames Estuary until 2100, based on economic costs, benefits and flood risk.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Questions

Asked by *The Countess of Mar*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has received notification of the export of genetically modified mosquito eggs to Brazil by the United Kingdom company Oxitec for deliberate release experiments under EC regulation 1946/2003; if so, when they were notified; and whether they will provide a copy of the associated risk assessment.

[HL6140]

To ask Her Majesty's Government, based on the export notifications sent to them under EC regulation 1946/2003, what were the dates of the exports of genetically modified mosquito eggs by the United Kingdom company Oxitec to (a) the Cayman Islands, (b) Malaysia, (c) Brazil, (d) France, (e) India, (f) Singapore, (g) Thailand, (h) the United States, and (i) Vietnam. [HL6141]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): Exports of genetically modified organisms are only required to be notified to the UK competent authority under regulation 1946/2003 if they are to be exported to a non-EU country for release into the environment. Movements of CMOs between EU member states are not covered by this requirement. Nor are exports to non-EU countries where the GMO is intended for contained use, as was the case in respect of the shipment of mosquito eggs by Oxitec to Malaysia, Brazil, India, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam. The date of the export of GM mosquito eggs to the Cayman Islands for release to the environment was 4 November 2009.

If importing nations wish to release GM mosquitoes descended from those under contained use they will do so under their own local legislation. Where the country of import is also a party to the Cartagena Protocol, an international agreement which aims to ensure the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms, it will be required to notify such a decision to the biosafety clearing house.

Government Departments: Budgets

Question

Asked by *Lord Hunt of Chesterton*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether Government departments, agencies and contractors are required to ensure that their budgets and bids

include the cost of providing appropriate training; and whether they reject bids by contractors when such training is not included. [HL6111]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: If the provision of training to departmental staff is part of the requirement for goods or services, this should be specified and is likely to form part of the evaluation process.

In regard to contractors' training of their staff working on government contracts, potential contractors' technical and professional capability to perform a contract is assessed at the selection stage of a procurement. Contract management can be used to check that capability is sustained over the life of the contract.

Public sector procurers should always ensure that their budgets include sufficient funds to meet the full costs of goods and services to be procured.

Government Departments: Expenditure Cuts

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will discipline those officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and UK Trade and Investment who have disregarded their policy on spending restraint and their commitment to cost savings in public sector expenditure. [HL5892]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear since taking office that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)'s budget has to be spent carefully and wisely and that he will hold budget holders to account. He called together the acting chief executive of UK Trade and Investment and senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials to underline and reiterate the importance of this.

All officials are governed by the Civil Service Code, which requires public money and other resources to be used properly and efficiently; and all expenditure is incurred in accordance with the principles of *Managing Public Money* and the HM Treasury handbook on regularity and propriety.

Government Departments: Official Meetings

Question

Asked by **Lord Moonie**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what advice the Ministerial Code offers on Ministers meeting companies and individuals on ministerial business without a civil servant being in attendance. [HL5795]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: It is for Ministers to determine such attendance.

Government Departments: Procurement

Question

Asked by **Lord Myners**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Taylor of Holbeach on 20 December (WA 265), how they will keep Parliament informed of the economic value of the savings achieved as a consequence of the implementation of the recommendations made by Sir Philip Green in his review of the efficiency of government expenditure processes. [HL5601]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: Sir Philip Green's recommendations have been taken into account as part of the current efficiency programmes already under way. Parliament will be kept informed on the outcomes of these programmes in the usual way.

Government Departments: Staff

Questions

Asked by **Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they propose to publish the future programme of the Behavioural Insights Team based in the Cabinet Office. [HL5619]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: The programme is set by the team's quarterly steering board. Its current work programme for the beginning of this year includes a focus on health, money (in particular consumer empowerment) and the environment.

Asked by **Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many staff work in the Behavioural Insights Team based in the Cabinet Office. [HL5620]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: The Behavioural Insights Team has seven members of staff and a director.

Asked by **Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the budget of the Behavioural Insights Team based in the Cabinet Office during the current Spending Review period. [HL5621]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the annual budget of the Behavioural Insights Team in the Cabinet Office. [HL6104]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: The team will be shortly setting its budget for the coming financial year. As part of our drive to improve transparency, the number of staff and staff costs will be published in due course.

Government Departments: Websites

Question

Asked by **Lord Hunt of Chesterton**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have proposals for the presentation on their web pages of details of services and products provided by contractors to departments and agencies in order to promote British organisations' ability to provide high-quality services and products. [HL6113]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: In line with the Prime Minister's transparency commitments set out last May central government departments have been required to publish:

All new central government ICT contracts over £10,000, online since July 2010;

All new central government tender documents for contracts over £10,000 on a single website since September 2010, with this information to be made available to the public free of charge; and

All new central government contracts over £10,000 to be published in full since January 2011.

Tender documents and contracts are published on Contracts Finder. Contracts Finder was made available to the public in early January and is the Government's single platform for providing access to public sector procurement-related information and documentation, including procurement opportunities, free of charge. Contracts Finder can be found at www.businesslink.gov.uk/contractsfinder/.

Contracts Finder includes contracts awarded to all suppliers, regardless of nationality. As public procurement operates in open EU and international markets it would be inappropriate to restrict publication to contracts won by UK companies. Over time, greater transparency of opportunities, tender documents and contracts is likely to lead to significant benefits including increased competition and better value for money.

Government: Ministerial Memoirs

Question

Asked by **Lord Lester of Herne Hill**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether a former Minister is entitled to publish a memoir about his stewardship in public office and to suppress public disclosure of his correspondence relating to the information and opinions contained in the memoir; and, if so, upon what basis. [HL6146]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: Former Ministers intending to publish their memoirs are required to conform to the principles set out in the Radcliffe report of 1976 (Cm 6386), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Decisions on the disclosure of official information are made by departments in accordance with relevant legislation including the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Health: GP Commissioning Groups

Questions

Asked by **Lord Moonie**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the value of the contract between NHS London and KPMG to help develop general practitioner commissioning consortia pathfinders; how long it is for; and what are the break points and penalty clauses. [HL6091]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the success criteria in the contract between NHS London and KPMG to help develop general practitioner commissioning consortia pathfinders; and what success fees are in it. [HL6092]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the key objectives of the contract between NHS London and KPMG to help develop general practitioner commissioning consortia pathfinders. [HL6093]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): This is a matter for NHS London. The noble Lord may wish to contact Professor Mike Spyer, interim chair of the board, for further information.

Health: Medical Practitioners

Question

Asked by **Lord Mawson**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many (a) professors of general practice, (b) professors in secondary care medicine, and (c) consultants and general practitioners, there are in England. [HL5955]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): The NHS Information Centre does not identify professors of general practice or professors in secondary care medicine in its workforce census. The following table gives the number of consultants and general practitioners (GPs) in England as at 30 September 2009, the latest data available.

All Consultants and GPs (excluding retainers and registrars) in England

2009	
All GPs (excluding retainers and registrars)	35,917
All Consultants	36,950

Notes:

Figures as at 30 September 2009

1. The GP Data census do not capture data on numbers of professors of general practice.

2. The job role of professor is also not used within Medical and Dental census payscale groupings. While there may be Professors counted within the census, it is not possible to separately identify them from other grades

Health: Social Enterprises

Question

Asked by **Lord Mawson**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many social or small enterprises applied for the contract won by KPMG to provide support for primary care commissioning in London. [HL5953]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): The department does not hold this information centrally. The noble Lord may wish to contact the Chair of NHS London direct.

Herbal Medicines

Question

Asked by **Lord Pearson of Rannoch**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the answer by Earl Howe on 13 January (*HL Deb*, col 1529), how many people have died since 2000 from adverse reactions to (a) herbal medicines, and (b) prescribed drugs. [HL6114]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and Commission for Human Medicines (CHM) run a spontaneous adverse drug reaction reporting scheme (the Yellow Card scheme) which collates suspected adverse drug reaction (ADR) reports from health professionals, patients and indirectly via the pharmaceutical industry. Since 2000 a total of 245,386 ADR reports have been received via the Yellow Card scheme; of these, 837 ADR reports have been received in association with herbal medicines. Since 2000 10,446 (4 per cent) ADR reports have reported a fatal outcome; of these fatal ADR reports, eight have been reported in association with herbal medicines.

These data refer to ADR reports for all medicines and do not specifically relate to medicines obtained with a prescription. The MHRA's ADR database does not distinguish between how the medicine was obtained i.e. via prescription or over the counter.

The number of reports received via the Yellow Card scheme does not directly equate to the number of people who suffer adverse reactions in the general population to medicines as this scheme is associated with an unknown level of underreporting. A specific factor with underreporting of herbal medicines is that healthcare professionals often may not be aware where their patients have been taking herbal medicines.

It should be noted that healthcare professionals are asked to report suspected adverse reactions on a voluntary basis and the submission of a report does not mean that the reaction cited was definitely caused by the medicine or herbal.

Many factors have to be taken into account in assessing causal relationships including temporal association, the possible contribution of concomitant medication and the underlying disease being treated.

Higher Education: Overseas Students

Questions

Asked by **Lord Hunt of Kings Heath**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the benefits arising from students from other countries studying in the United Kingdom. [HL6045]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): The Government welcome genuine students from other countries to study at universities and colleges in the United Kingdom. They contribute to the diversity of our campuses; support our research capacity as well as providing a valuable source of income. In higher education alone, students from outside the European Union contribute almost £2.2 billion a year in tuition fees. Higher Education Statistics Agency figures published earlier this month show that 405,805 students from outside the United Kingdom were enrolled at UK HEIs in 2009-10, indicating the high regard in which the UK higher education sector is held around the world.

Asked by **Lord Hunt of Kings Heath**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the income derived by United Kingdom universities from students from other countries. [HL6046]

Lord Henley: Higher Education Statistics Agency data on institutional income for academic year 2008-09 indicate that higher education institutions in the United Kingdom received nearly £2.2 billion in tuition fee income from international students from outside the European Union. This is the latest year for which data are available.

House of Lords: Overnight Sittings

Question

Asked by **Lord Morris of Manchester**

To ask the Chairman of Committees whether there are any proposals to compensate staff of the House of Lords for extra working hours during the overnight sitting on 17-18 January. [HL6020]

The Chairman of Committees (Lord Brabazon of Tara): Staff undertaking night duty receive either overtime or a flat rate allowance calculated on the basis of the sitting patterns of the House over a rolling period. The only exceptions are certain senior Clerks and Black Rod, who do not receive additional remuneration.

Immigration

Questions

Asked by **Lord Hunt of Kings Heath**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what responses have been received to the current UK Border Agency consultation on changes to the student immigration system. [HL6042]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Neville-Jones): On 7 December, we published a public consultation—'*The Student Immigration System: A Consultation*'. As of 17 January 2011 we have received over 22,000 responses through the online survey, postal and e-mail submissions. Officials of the UK Border Agency have also spoken directly with representatives

of over 150 institutions and representative bodies to hear the views of the sector. We will publish the results of the consultation and announce our decisions on the reform of tier 4 in due course.

Asked by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact on the long-term competitiveness of the United Kingdom of the proposed changes to the immigration system.

[HL6075]

Baroness Neville-Jones: We carried out an extensive consultation on changes to economic migration and, in reaching final decisions, took account of the views of business, for example as regards intra-company transferees, prioritising tier 2 migrants over tier 1, and the needs of the scientific research community. We are also consulting on changes to the student visa system.

India

Question

Asked by Lord Patten

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Howell of Guildford on 21 December 2010 (*WA 296–7*), whether they will now raise the specific issue of the Devadasi system with the Government of India and British non-governmental organisations; and whether they have estimated the numbers of girls involved from other sources.

[HL6008]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We will include the issue of the Devadasi system in our ongoing dialogue on women's rights issues with the Government of India and with civil society organisations in both the UK and India. As the practice is formally prohibited it is difficult to obtain exact numbers, however Anti-Slavery International highlights official figures of around 17,000 women in Andhra Pradesh and 23,000 in Karnataka alone.

The Department for International Development (DfID) has worked extensively to help tackle gender inequality and discrimination against women in India. The EU also funded a project on Choice, Dignity and Integration for Devadasi (temple prostitutes) and the socially excluded in Karnataka from January 2008 to December 2010.

Israel and Palestine

Questions

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have made representations to the government of Israel following the arrest of Dr Omar Abdul Razeq, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, at Salfit earlier this month; and whether they have been informed of whether he has since been released and his possessions returned.

[HL5925]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We understand that Dr Omar Abdul Razeq was arrested on 11 January 2011 at his home in the city of Salfit. He appeared at court on 18 January 2011 when he was remanded in custody for a further eight days to allow additional time for questioning. The next hearing in his case will be held on 25 or 26 January 2011. No formal charges have yet been brought against him. We are not aware that his possessions have been returned to him or his family.

Our consulate in Jerusalem continues to monitor the case and is in contact with Dr Omar Abdul Razeq's lawyer.

Asked by Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the position of European Union diplomats that east Jerusalem should be treated as the future capital of Palestine; and whether they will support that move.

[HL5936]

Lord Howell of Guildford: We support the position set out in the December 2010 EU Foreign Affairs Council conclusions that a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both Israel and Palestine.

Migration Advisory Committee

Question

Asked by Lord Laird

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Neville-Jones on 10 January (*WA 404*), when the members of the Migration Advisory Committee were reappointed; whether there was a press statement issued publicising this fact; why all non ex-officio members appointed are labour market economists; and, as there are no fixed criteria for appointing members, whether they will increase its capacity by the appointment of additional members with other migration experience.

[HL5889]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Neville-Jones): The reappointment of the members of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) was announced in a news article on the UK Border Agency's website on 6 January. The appointment of labour market economists to these positions is consistent with the MAC's purpose, which is to advise on labour market needs and economic impacts in the context of the development of policy on migration. The Government has no plans to augment the membership of the MAC.

National Forest

Question

Asked by Lord Greaves

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much money has been provided to the National Forest Company in each year since its formation; and how much is planned to be provided for each future year.

[HL6062]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): Since its formation the National Forest Company has received the following grant in aid from Defra and its predecessors:

Year	£
1995-96	2,000,000
1996-97	2,000,000
1997-98	2,500,000
1998-99	2,500,000
1999-2000	3,100,000
2000-01	3,300,000
2001-02	3,550,000
2002-03	3,700,000
2003-04	3,785,000
2004-05	3,271,000
2005-06	4,200,000
2006-07	3,400,000
2007-08	3,350,000
2008-09	3,600,000
2009-10	3,310,000
2010-11	3,350,000

The National Forest Company has been notified of its indicative allocations of grant in aid for the next four years:

Year	£
2011-12	3,300,000
2012-13	3,100,000
2013-14	2,900,000
2014-15	2,800,000

Northern Ireland Office: Press Statements

Question

Asked by **Lord Laird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Shutt of Greetland on 10 January (*WA 406*), why they ended the practice of routinely publishing their press statements' "Notes to Editors" on the Northern Ireland Office's media centre website; how members of the public can find the biographical details of those appointed to public bodies; and whether they will in future add those details within press statements. [HL5888]

Lord Shutt of Greetland: There has been no change in policy.

The Northern Ireland Office will now, however, publish "Notes to Editors" on its website where they are included in a news release.

Pensions

Question

Asked by **Lord Boswell of Aynho**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportions of claimants of state retirement pensions (a) take their full entitlement on retirement, (b) defer their pension in favour of an enhanced pension taken subsequently, and (c) defer their pension in favour of a lump sum payment. [HL5851]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Lord Freud): The information available is in the table.

State pension on-flows in the six months to March 2010 by deferment status

	All	No deferment	Enhanced pension only	Lump sum and increments	Lump sum only
All	371,500	338,500	11,700	4,400	17,000
Male	173,200	162,600	3,700	1,500	5,500
Female	198,300	175,900	8,000	2,900	11,500

Source: DWP Information Directorate, 5 per cent sample.

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

2. Numbers are based on a 5 per cent sample rated in line with the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study total case load and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Religious Intolerance

Questions

Asked by **Lord Elton**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Howell of Guildford on 10 January (*WA 400* and *415*), whether, in determining what representations to make to the governments of other countries about discrimination, they regard a sustained exodus of members of a religious minority as one indicator of the extent of discrimination against members of that minority in that country. [HL6027]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): Persecution of religious groups or minorities manifests itself in a variety of ways. A sustained exodus of members of a religious minority can be one indicator of such persecution or discrimination. But persecution of religious groups or minorities frequently manifests itself in a variety of ways. Our overseas missions have a responsibility to monitor the human rights in their host countries and routinely raise our concerns with their Governments. Where possible our embassies take action on individual cases where persecution or discrimination has occurred and lobby for changes in discriminatory practices and laws. We condemn all instances of violence and discrimination against individuals and groups because of their faith or belief.

Asked by **Lord Elton**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Howell of Guildford on 10 January (*WA 400* and *415*), whether, in determining the priorities, care and vigour with which they promote the interests of religious minorities in other countries, they take full account of the history and the constitution of the United Kingdom. [HL6028]

Lord Howell of Guildford: In his speech on Britain's values in a networked world, on 15 September 2010, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear that the UK "must have a foreign policy based on values, as an extension of our identity as a society", and that we "should always seek to reflect the best of British society". This includes our tolerance of all religions in the UK. We reflect this internationally in the work the Foreign and Commonwealth Office undertakes to support the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and the right to freedom of opinion and expression as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the full implementation of the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Schools: Inspection

Questions

Asked by **Lord Bowness**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Hill of Oareford on 27 September (*WA 460-1*) and 8 November (*WA 39*) and the letters from HM Chief Inspector dated 21 July and 2 November 2010, how many school inspections were carried out by Ofsted in the years 2008-09 and 2009-10; and how many they estimate there will be in 2010-11. [HL5894]

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Hill of Oareford on 27 September (*WA 460-1*) and 8 November (*WA 39*) and the letters from HM Chief Inspector dated 21 July and 2 November 2010, how many school inspections were carried out by contractors in the years 2008-09 and 2009-10; and how many they estimate there will be in 2010-11. [HL5895]

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Hill of Oareford on 27 September (*WA 460-1*) and 8 November (*WA 39*) and the letters from HM Chief Inspector dated 21 July and 2 November 2010, how many people were engaged in each school inspection in the years 2008-09 and 2009-10; and how many they estimate there will be in 2010-11. [HL5896]

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Hill of Oareford on 27 September (*WA 460-1*) and 8 November (*WA 39*) and the letters from HM Chief Inspector dated 21 July and 2 November 2010, how many days school inspections took including preparation visits and follow-up in the years 2008-09 and 2009-10; and how many they estimate there will be in 2010-11. [HL5897]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Lord Hill of Oareford): These are matters for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, Christine Gilbert, has written to the noble Lord and a copy of her reply has been placed in the House Libraries.

Schools: Private Schools

Question

Asked by **Lord Taylor of Warwick**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to encourage private schools that are registered as charities to offer more free places to poor pupils. [HL5991]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: Charitable independent schools already deliver a wide range of benefits, not just in the high standards of education they provide, but also in the work they do in their communities, for example through outreach, partnerships with other schools, opening up their facilities, and bursaries to help the less well-off.

The Charity Commission published Guidance for charities on the public benefit requirement in 2008. The legal basis of the commission's guidance has been challenged by the Independent Schools Council, and the Attorney-General has made a reference to the Upper Tribunal (Tax and Chancery) inviting it to clarify the law that underpins the guidance. It would be inappropriate to comment further ahead of the tribunal's ruling.

Shipping: Ship-to-ship Transfers

Question

Asked by **Lord Condon**

To ask Her Majesty's Government who they consulted in their review which led to the decision to designate the sea off Southwold, Suffolk, as the only area in the United Kingdom where ship-to-ship transfers of oil will be permitted from April 2011. [HL5632]

Earl Attlee: The Shipping Minister, Mike Penning, made a Written Ministerial Statement to Parliament on 8 July 2010 (*Official Report*, columns *WS 17-18*), announcing the review of the Merchant Shipping (Ship-to-Ship Transfers) Regulations 2010 and inviting all interested parties to set out their views on the regulations. The text of the Written Ministerial Statement was placed on the Department for Transport's website on that same day.

Additionally, the Minister sent letters to a number of persons and bodies which had expressed, or were known to have, an interest in the Merchant Shipping (Ship-to-Ship Transfers) Regulations 2010, drawing their attention to the review. The Minister sent letters to 25 MPs, three Scottish Ministers, three industry bodies and one environmental non-governmental organisation.

A broad spectrum of persons and bodies went on to make representations to the Minister in the course of the review. A summary table setting out the substantive points made in the written representations which were received by the Minister and at the meetings which the Minister held at the request of interested parties has been placed on the department's website and may

be accessed via the following link: www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/173201/101207 Responses to review of ship-to-ship transfer regs 2010.pdf.

A copy of the document has also been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Towing Vessels

Question

Asked by *Lord Berkeley*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Earl Attlee on 24 November 2010 (*WA 360*), why their policy of ceasing the Maritime and Coastguard Agency emergency tender vessel contract and relying on the spot charter market as an alternative is not applied to the remaining general lighthouse authorities fleet. [HL5808]

Earl Attlee: The general lighthouse authorities deploy and utilise their fleet daily to meet their statutory requirements under the Merchant Shipping Act. The general lighthouse authorities have entirely different roles and responsibilities from those of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Trinity House has sought the advice of three independent expert maritime consultants, supported by Queen's Counsel legal advice, all of which showed that the use of the spot chartering market could not be relied upon to deliver its statutory duties.

Tunisia

Questions

Asked by *Lord Hylton*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of recent developments in Tunisia; and whether they and their European Union partners will assist in restoring the rule of law and democratic government. [HL5922]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): Following the resignation of Ben Ali, Prime Minister Ghannouchi was asked by the interim president to form a government of national unity, the membership of which was announced on 17 January 2011. The Prime Minister also announced that elections would take place within six months under international supervision and a range of measures to broaden political representation and freedoms would be introduced.

We hope that all Tunisians can work together to restore peace and improve governance and democratic accountability.

On 17 January 2011 EU High Representative Catherine Ashton issued a joint statement with Commissioner Stefan Fiile which made clear that the EU stands ready to provide immediate assistance to prepare and organise the electoral process as well as the broader support necessary for a genuine democratic transition. We are in frequent contact with EU partners to ensure this commitment is implemented.

Asked by *Baroness Tonge*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the current political situation in Tunisia; and what dialogue they will have with the interim government. [HL5939]

Lord Howell of Guildford: Following the resignation of Ben Ali, Prime Minister Ghannouchi was asked by the interim president to form a government of national unity, the membership of which was announced on 17 January 2011. The Prime Minister also announced that elections would take place within six months under international supervision and a range of measures to broaden political representation and freedoms would be introduced.

We hope that all Tunisians can work together to restore peace and improve governance and democratic accountability. We are working with partners, including in the EU, to promote political reform. We will be seeking to engage the Tunisian authorities as soon as possible to facilitate this.

Turkey

Question

Asked by *Lord Hylton*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the 2010 annual report of the Human Rights Association of Turkey; and what assessment they have made of its impact on Turkey's application for European Union membership. [HL5927]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The Government have not made an independent assessment of the report. The EU Commission makes its own assessment of Turkey's progress against the EU accession criteria and publishes an annual progress report. The 2010 report was published on 9 November 2010 and subsequently discussed by member states. It includes an assessment of human rights, noting that "Overall, some progress was made on observance of international human rights law. However, a number of reforms have been outstanding for several years. Legislation on human rights institutions needs to be brought fully in line with UN principles".

Uganda

Question

Asked by *Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the tabling in the Ugandan Parliament of the Traditional Leaders Bill to ban traditional and cultural Ugandan leaders from participating in partisan politics. [HL5984]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The Government of Uganda tabled a bill on traditional leaders in

Parliament on 17 December 2010 to give effect to Article 246 of the Ugandan Constitution which excludes traditional leaders from involvement in partisan politics. The bill is currently under consideration in the legal and constitutional affairs committee and a number of amendments, including deletion of some of the more contested clauses, were introduced by the responsible Minister on 19 January.

Supporters of the Kabaka of Buganda have alleged that the bill is intended to reduce his influence, although we are not aware that any of Uganda's traditional rulers contest the constitutional provision that they should remain above partisan politics. We will continue to urge the Ugandan authorities to ensure that any new legislation strikes an appropriate and legitimate balance between regulation and protection of the right to freedom of expression.

Universities: Funding

Question

Asked by *Lord Hunt of Kings Heath*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the projected change in income of United Kingdom universities. [HL6047]

Lord Henley: University income is made up of a number of funding streams from public, private and charitable sources. In terms of public funding, our reforms to higher education will shift the balance of resources for teaching from direct grant to institutions to funding that follows the choices made by individual students. This will provide strong incentives for institutions to focus on providing high quality teaching as efficiently as possible. Over time, popular and successful institutions will be able to grow and we expect new providers to enter the sector provided they can offer teaching to the high standards students will expect. We do not expect the overall income of the sector to reduce and we expect improved teaching quality and better informed students to have a positive impact on the economy. In recognition that the UK's research base is a vital national asset and critical to long term economic growth, funding for science and research programmes has been protected in cash terms in a ring-fenced budget for the spending review period. Around half of this funding currently goes directly into universities. The remainder goes to institutes, many of which are sited in universities, and to large facilities, many of which are used by university researchers.

Violence against Women Overseas

Questions

Asked by *Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they decided, and will develop, the role of the Minister responsible for dealing with issues relating to violence against women in the developing world. [HL6072]

To ask Her Majesty's Government what activities the Minister responsible for issues relating to violence against women in the developing world has undertaken; and whether the Minister maintains regular

contact with (a) the Department for International Development, (b) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, (c) the Ministry of Defence, and (d) other appropriate Government departments. [HL6073]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Neville-Jones): The Government believe that violence against women and girls overseas is an issue that needs to be addressed and that the UK can contribute by working with our partners in the developing world. In support of this, the role of the ministerial champion for tackling violence against women overseas was confirmed on 25th November 2010.

The role is still in development but will be responsible for providing policy coherence and coordination across Whitehall, ensuring that violence against women and girls is fully integrated into our international work. The ministerial champion will represent the United Kingdom overseas, building our diplomatic efforts and raising the profile of this issue with international partners.

The Department for International Development, along with the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence and Government Equalities Office, all work on tackling violence against women overseas. Ministerial responsibility for taking forward the UK's work overseas will continue to rest with relevant departmental Ministers and information on progress on this agenda is shared in bilaterals and at the inter-ministerial group on violence against women and girls chaired by the Home Secretary.

Volunteer Centres

Question

Asked by *Baroness Scott of Needham Market*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the England-wide Volunteering Infrastructure Programme will provide funds to existing as well as to new volunteer centres. [HL6109]

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: The Volunteering Infrastructure Programme will connect people with local volunteering opportunities and support organisations to manage volunteers. The Government are currently considering the shape of the programme, including the eligibility criteria.

There will be further announcements on the volunteering infrastructure programme in the coming months.

Water Supply: Toxic Chemicals

Question

Asked by *The Countess of Mar*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent studies have been conducted on the quality of water in the aquifers that supply major cities in south Wales which may have been subject to leaching of toxic chemicals from Brofiscin Quarry. [HL6144]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): The major cities of South Wales are

not supplied with water from aquifers. The public water supply is provided by above-ground reservoirs outside the catchment.

Studies continue to be undertaken on the aquifer affected directly by the waste in Brofiscin quarry, which is not exploited for public water supply. The evidence to date shows that the waste is unlikely to impact on the good status under the water framework directive of the south east valleys carboniferous limestone block.

Young People: Custody

Question

Asked by Lord Laird

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the present entitlements under the Assisted Prisons Visits Scheme for families of young people in custody; when they were set; and when they are next due to be reviewed.

[HL6033]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord McNally): The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme covers families of young people placed in youth offender institutions. The scheme entitlements are the same as for visitors and families of adult offenders in HM prisons. The specific entitlements are in the note below.

An assisted family visits scheme is also provided for sentenced young people in secure training centres and secure children's homes which reimburses the young person's family for the cost of visiting them once a week.

The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme has evolved over the past 60 years and is reviewed every year; this year jointly and in partnership with relevant prisoner's families and children's charities.

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