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## Topical Questions

**Volume 660: debated on Tuesday 21 May 2019**

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**Sarah Champion >**

(Rotherham) (Lab)

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T1. If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities. ([911026 \(Unique identification number \)](#))

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer >**

(Mr Philip Hammond)

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My principal focus is to ensure the continued resilience of the UK economy at a time of domestic and international economic uncertainty. By maintaining our balanced approach to the public finances and continuing to focus on investment and cutting taxes for working families, we have ensured that public debt is now falling sustainably, employment is at a record high, wages are rising and Britain's economy is forecast to grow more than three times as fast as Germany's this year.

**Sarah Champion >**

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The report by the all-party group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse demonstrated the economic impact of not supporting victims: 72% said it had had a negative impact on their career; 65% on their education; and 46% on their financial situation. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said about survivors that

"it should be government's responsibility to prioritise support for these people".

Will the Chancellor prioritise support for these services in the spending review?

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury >**

(Elizabeth Truss)

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I had a very useful meeting with the hon. Lady a month or so ago, and we are now taking forward the work and evidence she presented us with and working with the Home Office on looking at the economic benefits of taking more action to help survivors of child sexual abuse. It is a priority for the spending review to make sure we deal with violence against women and girls.

**Mr Philip Dunne >**

(Ludlow) (Con)

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T2. The Government have an excellent track record in tackling climate change, notwithstanding what Opposition Members said earlier, and I applaud their commitment to doing more. Will the Chancellor consider introducing incentives in the comprehensive spending review to encourage occupiers and owners of industrial and agricultural buildings to improve their energy efficiency?

(911027 (Unique identification number))

### The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury >

(Robert Jenrick)

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The clean growth strategy set out our ambition to enable businesses and industry to improve energy efficiency by 20% by 2030. Today farmers in a community such as Ludlow can make use of the rural development programme for agricultural buildings, but we have also announced two new schemes. First, there is the £315 million investment in a new industrial energy transformation fund, and secondly, we have published a call for evidence on a business energy efficiency scheme focused on smaller businesses.

### John McDonnell >

(Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)

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The Chancellor's speech to the CBI this evening has been much trailed. I welcome his clear warnings to his Conservative colleagues about the hit the economy would face from a no-deal Brexit, especially those who have said there is nothing to fear from a no deal. For the benefit of Members in the Chamber, will he explain what he sees as the impact of a no-deal Brexit and his clear view that with

"all the preparation in the world"

a no-deal Brexit will still damage our economy?

### Mr Philip Hammond >

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I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman: I may not have to take the trouble to go and deliver the speech this evening.

The right hon. Gentleman has raised a serious point. There are two separate effects of a no-deal Brexit that concern me. First, there will clearly be short-term disruption, which will have an unpredictable and potentially significant effect on our economy. Secondly, and probably more importantly, all the analysis that the Government and external commentators have published shows that there will be a longer-term effect, meaning that our economy will be smaller than it would otherwise have been. I did not come into politics to make our economy smaller; I came into politics to make our economy bigger, and to make our people better off.

### John McDonnell >

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I shall be happy to deliver the Chancellor's speech this evening. Any time!

The reality is that for many the Brexit vote was, and may well be again, a kick at the establishment: an establishment that has inflicted nine years of harsh austerity on them, and which many feel has ignored them. As has been revealed this week, that austerity programme has meant children going to school hungry, without warm clothes or dry shoes, and single mothers with no food in their cupboards skipping meals so that their children can eat. Does the Chancellor even acknowledge the role that his austerity politics have played in delivering the Brexit vote?

### Mr Hammond >

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I think the reasons behind the Brexit vote are complex, and it would be trite to stand here and try to identify them simplistically. Let me also remind the right hon. Gentleman of the contribution that his party's Government made to the situation that we inherited, which caused us to have to make the tough decisions to which he has implicitly referred.

**Michael Tomlinson >**

(Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con)

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Ten days ago, I met heads and chairs of governors from across my constituency at Corfe Hill School. Will the Chief Secretary to the Treasury meet me to discuss their specific concerns about schools funding, and the need for additional funding for our schools in Poole and in Dorset as a whole?

**Elizabeth Truss >** [Share](#)

I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. We are looking at schools funding, alongside other funding, as part of the spending review. It is a public priority, and we are taking it very seriously.

**Jo Swinson >**

(East Dunbartonshire) (LD)

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T3. We are the last generation that can act to prevent irreversible harm from being done to our planet, so we need to act with urgency. Will the Chancellor bring forward the tax on the use of virgin plastic to boost recycling and incentivise plastic-free options? We do not have three years to wait. ([911028 \(Unique identification number \)](#))

**Robert Jenrick >** [Share](#)

I am proud that this country will be the first in the world to introduce a new, innovative plastic packaging tax. We are in the process of formulating the tax. We have finished the consultation, and have received a large number of responses. We will be presenting proposals in the forthcoming Budget.

**Peter Aldous >**

(Waveney) (Con)

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Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor consider changing the method of assessing a property's rateable value, so that all shops on the high street pay business rates that reflect their profitability and trading potential, putting them on a level playing field with their out-of-town and online competitors?

**Mr Philip Hammond >** [Share](#)

I understand my hon. Friend's wish to ensure the vibrancy of the high street, which is going through a very difficult period. Owing to the way in which the business rate system works, relieving the burden on any part of the system means imposing it somewhere else, so we would have to look carefully at that, but I will take my hon. Friend's representation as a serious proposal and consider it.

**Mary Glendon >**

(North Tyneside) (Lab)

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T4. Out-sourced low-paid workers in both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are on strike because their employers, Interserve, ISS and Aramark, are refusing to pay the London living wage, and in some cases have not paid staff wages for weeks. Will the Chancellor stand up for those employees, and do whatever he can to help Departments bring outsourced contracts back in-house? ([911029 \(Unique identification number \)](#))

**Mr Hammond >**[Share](#)

That is a matter for the Departments concerned. As the hon. Lady knows, there is a legal obligation to pay the national living wage, and we have put additional resources into ensuring that that obligation is enforced. We encourage employers to pay higher rates than the national living wage when they are able to, and we will continue to do so.

**Kevin Hollinrake >**

(Thirsk and Malton) (Con)

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When Sally Masterton discovered a £1 billion fraud at Lloyds Bank the bank discredited her, constructively dismissed her and prevented her from working with the police investigation. Five years later Lloyds apologised for her mistreatment but nobody at the bank has been formally investigated or sanctioned for this mistreatment. Will the Minister use his powers to instruct the Financial Conduct Authority to carry out that investigation?

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury >**

(John Glen)

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As my hon. Friend knows, the FCA is conducting two investigations into the events at HBOS Reading and Lloyds has instructed Linda Dobbs to look into who knew what when. It is absolutely clear now that such circumstances could not be repeated given the action we have taken with the senior managers regime, but I look forward to the outcome of those reviews and we will be taking action accordingly.

**Emma Dent Coad >**

(Kensington) (Lab)

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T5. According to the *Sunday Times* rich list the 10 wealthiest people in the country have a combined wealth of £143 billion; half of them live in my constituency. Meanwhile, according to the Child Poverty Action Group, across Kensington and Chelsea 8,500 children—37%—live in poverty, and in one ward nearly half do. Inequality in my constituency is getting worse. When will the Chancellor reverse this trickle-up economy by chasing tax-dodging plutocrats who are stealing food from the mouths of our children, many of them from working poor families? (911030 (Unique identification number))

**Mr Philip Hammond >**[Share](#)

We are chasing tax dodgers everywhere. *[Interruption.]* Yes, we are. We have raised £200 billion of additional revenue since 2010 by clamping down on tax avoidance and evasion. Yet what did I hear when I came into the Chamber today? I heard Labour Member after Labour Member challenging my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury about the loan charge, a clear attempt to deal with a piece of egregious tax avoidance which Opposition Members seem to have a totally different view about.

**Vicky Ford >**

(Chelmsford) (Con)

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If we want more renewables and more electric cars we need a more resilient electricity grid, and that needs more investment. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the last thing we need for a cleaner, greener Britain is for the Labour party to wipe billions of pounds off our National Grid's investment capacity?

**Mr Speaker >**

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What we want is a brief sentence on the Government's policy. We are not having dilations on the policies of other parties; that is not the purpose of Question Time.

**Elizabeth Truss** >

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I think the idea that an industry could be nationalised not at market value is completely wrong; that is fundamentally against the principle of property rights on which our entire economy is built.

**Judith Cummins** >

(Bradford South) (Lab)

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T6. The Government's Social Mobility Commission recently stated that social mobility in the UK has stagnated over the last four years. One of its key recommendations is that the Government should significantly increase funding for further education in the upcoming spending review. Given that Bradford College plans to cut 131 of its staff, will the Chancellor listen to his Government's own commission, boost FE funding and give the most disadvantaged students the opportunities they deserve? (911031 (Unique identification number ))

**Elizabeth Truss** >

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I am working very closely with the Department for Education, looking at the FE sector and at the new qualifications we are introducing, such as T-levels, and making sure the sector is sustainable in the future. We are also reforming it to deliver the best possible outcome for students.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** >

(Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)

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What estimate has my right hon. Friend made of the effect on national debt of nationalising the National Grid and the effect it would have on the taxes paid by ordinary working people and the public services they receive in my constituency?

**Mr Philip Hammond** >

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We know that the cumulative burden of the commitments made by the Opposition Front Bench would reach almost £1 trillion over a Parliament, and I have heard—*[Interruption.]* If the shadow Chancellor has a number, no doubt we will hear about it in a moment; I have heard him say that it does not matter because these companies are profitable, so the profits will pay the additional interest costs. But let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) something: I remember the last time we had widespread nationalisation in this country and—do you know what?—none of the companies the Government owned was profitable. Funny that, isn't it?

**Anna Turley** >

(Redcar) (Lab/Co-op)

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T7. I have listened in astonishment to the answers from the Financial Secretary and the Chancellor about the loan charges. Given that the Financial Secretary admitted that the Government were pursuing six companies on a legal basis over this—they are admitting they are the companies responsible—why do they pursue constituents like mine, many of whom were obliged to undertake these tax changes in order to get work? (911032 (Unique identification number ))

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury >**

(Mel Stride)

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We are simply making sure that the tax that was always due is paid, and that is right and proper. As I have set out, we are taking a front-footed approach to clamping down on promoters, and that has included six recent arrests for potential criminal activities.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin >**

(Derbyshire Dales) (Con)

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Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledge the important role that the national lottery has played in this country? When he looks at the national lottery, will he ensure that any future lottery that is run on a national basis is taxed at the same rate?

**Mr Philip Hammond >** [Share](#)

My right hon. Friend raises an interesting question, and I will look carefully at the taxation of the national lottery and any future lotteries.

**Wera Hobhouse >**

(Bath) (LD)

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Anti-idling rules are a good start in reducing air pollution, but local authorities need the legal powers and resources to enforce them. Would the Treasury consider making new money available to local authorities to stop cars idling?

**Robert Jenrick >** [Share](#)

The Government have committed £3.5 billion to improving air quality for the entire population, and I understand that that involves Bath and North East Somerset Council receiving nearly £6.5 million. I understand that the council is also expected to bid for part of the £220 million clean air fund, and I wish it luck with its application.

**Rebecca Pow >**

(Taunton Deane) (Con)

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I am pleased to hear that education is going to get a special focus in the forthcoming spending review. Please can Somerset have special consideration, since pupils there get way below the national average in both secondary and primary school funding? With a sound economy, I am sure that we can sort this out.

**Elizabeth Truss >** [Share](#)

I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this issue. The reality is that there is a big gap in funding, with the lowest-funded authorities getting approximately £4,300 per pupil and the top-funded authorities getting £6,800. We are looking at that, because we have to have fairness across the country.

**Bill Esterson >**

(Sefton Central) (Lab)

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Revenue funding continues to flow to oil refineries in the middle east at the expense of tidal technology, an area in which we are a world leader. When will this Government accept that investing in tidal energy would bring huge benefits to the whole economy?

**Robert Jenrick** >

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This Government are investing in innovation in the tidal and marine sector. For example, we have invested in the marine innovation centre in Shetland, and I recently met a delegation to discuss those proposals. However, investments that we make on behalf of the taxpayer have to be the right strategic energy investments for the country and provide good value for money for the taxpayer.

**Steve Double** >

(St Austell and Newquay) (Con)

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I met headteachers and school governors across Cornwall recently, and they are very concerned about the pressure that their school budgets are under, so can I put in my bid for more money for education in the comprehensive spending review, and can we ensure that that money is fairly distributed so that schools in Cornwall get their fair share?

**Elizabeth Truss** >

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It sounds like I will not need to conduct any more meetings, because we can just continue this debate in the Chamber. I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I agree that there is unfairness across the system. We are working on that at the moment.

**Luke Pollard** >

(Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)

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Wherever the Royal Navy deploys, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary deploys alongside it, but instead of getting the 2.9% pay increase that the sailors got, RFA personnel got a below-inflation 1.5% increase. As the total cost of the difference is only £400,000, will the Government think again and give our brave RFA crews the pay rise they deserve?

**Elizabeth Truss** >

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Royal Fleet Auxiliary personnel are part of the civil service, so this is a matter for the Cabinet Office, alongside the Ministry of Defence, but I am sure that it will have heard the hon. Gentleman's representations.

**Justine Greening** >

(Putney) (Con)

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As the questions today have demonstrated, the Treasury needs to take a much longer-term view of investing in people and their human capital, just as it does in relation to physical capital. When is the Office for National Statistics' human capital review finally going to report? It was announced in March 2018, but I cannot even find out whether its consultation has been published yet.

**Mr Philip Hammond** >

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I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, because it was at her prompting that I originally asked the Office for National Statistics to look at how we measure and value human capital to ensure that there is no systematic bias against human capital in favour of physical capital. The ONS has in fact delivered its draft report, and the question of how we measure and value human capital will be at the centre of the spending review process.

**Diana Johnson >**

(Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

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Has the time not come for the Chancellor to heed the call from the Westminster leaders of seven Opposition parties to fund proper compensation for those infected and affected by the NHS blood scandal across the whole United Kingdom?

**Mr Hammond >** [Share](#)

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That is an issue for the Department of Health and Social Care. I understand the hon. Lady's concerns, and I will pass them on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.