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Business of the House

Volume 731: debated on Thursday 27 April 2023

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🕒 12.38pm

The Leader of the House of Commons >

(Penny Mordaunt)

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The business for the week commencing 1 May will include:

Monday 1 May—The House will not be sitting.

Tuesday 2 May—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, followed by general debate on support for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

Wednesday 3 May—Consideration of Lords amendments to the National Security Bill, followed by remaining stages of the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill.

The House will rise for the coronation recess at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 3 May and return on Tuesday 9 May.

The provisional business for the week commencing 8 May includes:

Monday 8 May—The House will not be sitting.

Tuesday 9 May—Second Reading of the Energy Bill [*Lords*].

Wednesday 10 May—Consideration of an allocation of time motion, followed by all stages of the Northern Ireland (Interim Arrangements) Bill.

Thursday 11 May—Debate on a motion on the future of overseas territories, followed by general debate on no recourse to public funds. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

Friday 12 May—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 15 May includes:

Monday 15 May—Second Reading of the Victims and Prisoners Bill.

Thangam Debbonaire >

(Bristol West) (Lab)

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I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business. First, on behalf of the 43 staff members who have asked me directly because they want to book their holidays, and all the others who have not, please can we have some recess dates? As soon as we get back, perhaps—there are no business questions next week, so maybe the week after.

It is amazing to see that the Leader of the House still has it: the former magician's assistant can abracadabra a brand-new Illegal Migration Bill just like that. That is what it felt like yesterday, with countless Government amendments to their own Bill. Report stage is the new Second Reading. Can she tell us why they were not in the Bill when it was published two months ago, or debated in Committee? Is piling the Bill with last minute amendments not just another tyrannical Tory tactic to swerve scrutiny?

We can add illusionist to the Leader of the House's magical talents. She must have conjured up the image in my head of her telling me that she hoped to see the Bill's impact assessment. After so many times of asking for it, I was hopeful. She seemed so confident. She said that she would ask the Home Secretary directly, yet here we are the day after, and here it is not. Could she magic it up now, so at least the Lords can see it before they debate the Bill? It seems that Home Office Ministers cannot even answer the most basic questions on how the Bill will work. Perhaps the Leader of the House will have a go at just one: does she know how many former RAF bases the Government need to accommodate the tens of thousands of people who will be detained under the new law? I say that she does not, and the Home Secretary will not tell her, either. Has anyone worked it out, or is the Home Secretary just winging it?

The Tory party is in disarray. The highly respected right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), a former Prime Minister rightly respected for her work on modern slavery, attacked this Tory Bill for giving traffickers greater leverage over victims to keep them in slavery. The blue on blue continued, with others concerned about safe and legal routes. We had amendments on both those issues, on tackling terrorism and on any number of things that Government Members could have voted for.

At the end of business yesterday, the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) gave his Minister a tough time over a lack of local consultation on asylum seeker accommodation. That reminds me: just an hour before, Labour had given him the opportunity to vote for—wait for it—an amendment on local consultation on asylum seeker accommodation. Where was he when it came to a vote?

Pick a Bill—any Bill—and the Government's utter disdain for this House, its Members, and by extension the British people, is clear. Bills chopping and changing as they wrangle their Back Benchers into place—that is no way to run a rodeo. Poor policy, lazy lawmaking and a gutless Government who know that their policies cannot withstand proper scrutiny. One of our scrutiny tools is Opposition days. The Leader of the House cannot just wave her magic wand to cut the cost of living—she has to vote for it. Why, then, did she and the rest of the Tories vote against Labour's plans on Tuesday to cut the cost of living for her constituents? Thirteen years of Tory Governments crashing and mismanaging the economy. Wages squeezed, inflation at more than 10%, soaring mortgages and rents, food prices rising the fastest in 45 years, and the Government's answer to their own mess is no rabbits out the hat, just 24 Tory tax rises since 2019 and the highest tax burden in 70 years.

On Tuesday, Labour gave the Tories another chance to abolish the non-dom tax loophole, so that the super-rich who live and work here can pay their fair share of taxes. Labour would choose to spend that on more health staff and breakfast clubs for kids, but the Tories voted against it. We also gave the Tories the chance to extend the windfall tax on oil and gas profits. Labour would choose to spend that on easing the cost of living crisis by freezing council tax this year. But no, the Tories voted against it.

Politics is about choices, and the Government are choosing non-doms and oil and gas giants over working people. Labour will not waste valuable time here on performative Bills that only make people's lives worse, as the Tories are choosing to do. Labour will cut the cost of living, cut waiting lists and cut crime. That is the difference. That is the choice next Thursday. I wish all Labour candidates in the elections the very best of luck.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I want to start by echoing what the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said earlier with regard to the coronation and thanking all Members who are helping their constituents to prepare for that incredible moment for our country, and everyone working to ensure that the event can go ahead safely, including many members of House staff. I encourage everyone to take part.

The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) rightly presses me on recess dates. I understand how important that is not just for Members but for staff. I hope to be able to announce those very shortly and will ensure that we do so.

The hon. Lady raised the very important matter of the Illegal Migration Bill. I can only conclude from Labour's behaviour this week, and from what the hon. Lady has said, that they are happy with the status quo. We are determined to ensure that the finite resource we have is best used to support the most vulnerable and those to whom we have a particular moral obligation. That is the purpose of the Bill. It is difficult stuff that we are doing. That is why we have carefully thought this out. I agree with her that impact assessments are very important. The impact assessment for the Bill will be published today, in advance of its swift progress, hopefully, through the House of Lords.

The hon. Lady has told many jokes at my expense about my former career as a magician's assistant. It is a little rich, because if there are people in this place who should be accused of illusions and sleight of hand, it is Labour, given its approach to even its own Opposition day debate this week. Her accounts of what happened rival the narratives of Comical Ali for their accuracy and situational awareness. What happened was that Labour, together with the Liberal Democrats and the Green party, passed up the chance to vote for or against a motion this week that would set targets for reducing sewage discharges and financially penalise companies that do not honour their duties. Only the Conservatives voted for that, and only the Conservatives have done something about it—and ditto on the cost of living issue, which she also mentioned.

On sewage, the hon. Lady may know that Labour has pulled all its attack ads on this issue for the local election campaign, because it has been found out. Its campaign has been a deliberate distraction—or perhaps, given the matter under discussion, I should say a stool pigeon—from the reality of ending storm overflows, which is an important matter for our constituents. Labour is being found out. It has been found out on sewage this week. It has been exposed for saying that it will freeze council tax when it more than doubled it in government, and every single one of Labour's councils covering every single member of the shadow Cabinet have not frozen it; they have hiked it up.

Labour says it wants a compassionate, fair, effective asylum system, but it will not take the tough decisions to deliver one. Labour says it is tough on crime, but it consistently blocks measures to protect the public. The Labour party is supposed to be an alternative Government—that is what it is supposed to look like. This week it has not even looked like an effective protest group.

Andrew Percy >

(Brigg and Goole) (Con)

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This morning, the Center for Countering Digital Hate issued a shocking report on the online activities of Press TV, particularly its use of a video series called “Palestine Declassified”, which focuses its hatred on British Jews. Among other things on social media, Press TV has been promoting claims that Jews were involved in 9/11 and in covid conspiracies, and it has promoted articles claiming that the holocaust is the greatest lie ever told. While Press TV may be banned from our airwaves, this foreign state hate operation is continuing online. May we have a debate at some point on what more we can do to ensure that social media platforms tackle this outrageous content?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for raising this very important matter. It should be a concern to all Members of the House that these dangerous and, in many cases, antisemitic conspiracy theories can still be promoted and do gain traction. As my hon. Friend will know, I take this matter very seriously and gave a speech on it a couple of months ago. It is an excellent topic for debate. The current Members survey includes questions, among many others, on what further services the Library could provide. I think that ensuring we can all understand what is going on with these kinds of campaigns, and who is behind them, is something we should consider.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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I call the SNP spokesperson.

Brendan O'Hara >

(Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

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Last week, while gleefully celebrating the supposed woes of the SNP, the Leader of the House and her opposite number, the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), pitched their tents so high on the moral high ground that it is a wonder they did not get altitude sickness. But my goodness, life comes at you fast! Seven days on and a bullying scandal has claimed the career of a Tory Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), while Labour's inter-factional warfare continues to spill out into the public domain, with a former shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke

Newington (Ms Abbott), following their former party leader out the door. Tempted as I am, given last week's shenanigans, I will make no further comment, save to say that perhaps we should have a Government-led debate on the UK glazing industry and the benefit it would gain from people in glass houses being addicted to throwing stones.

However, I will add a thank you, because the more hysterical their attacks on us, the more our membership grows—it is up 3,000 in the past couple of weeks to 75,000. How that compares to the number of members of other political parties in Scotland we will never know, because as far as the Unionists are concerned, transparency is strictly for other people. For all we know, there could be literally hundreds of Scottish Tories running around, and we just would not know.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will tell you who was transparent this week: Lord Frost. The unelected—indeed, never elected—brains behind Brexit finally said out loud what they have all been thinking when he said

“not only must no more powers be devolved to Scotland, it's time to reverse the process”.

The emboldened lord doubled down when, on Toytown TV, he said that there had been a lot of private messaging from sympathisers in the party saying, “Keep talking—this needs to be said.” Can we therefore have a debate so that the Leader of the House and her colleagues can rally around the noble Lord Frost and his attempts to quell Scottish democracy?

Penny Mordaunt >

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Whatever political party people support, I am always encouraged to hear that membership of political parties is growing. However, I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if we do not trust him on the figures.

Brendan O'Hara >

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Let's compare!

Penny Mordaunt >

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I would be happy to. In all honesty, I am really surprised at what the hon. Gentleman has said and his choice of questioning today. There was no humility, no regret and no apology. Whatever our political beliefs and the differences over our ambitions for the Union, there is a common understanding among all of us in this place of the shared values and principles that underpin our democracy—I hope that is the case. I will never share the beliefs of the hon. Gentleman's party membership on Scottish independence; I may also disagree with Lord Frost, on occasion. However, I think I do understand the ambitions of the SNP membership and what they are based on, because my ambitions for our country are based on the same things: self-determination, agency, moral courage, progress of humanity and love of country.

How devastating it must be for SNP members and supporters to have placed their hopes and trust in the hands of people who have been so reckless with their dreams and the mandate that they have given them. Now they know how many Scottish taxpayers also feel when they look at the SNP's ruinous sell-off and sell-out of their country. Just when we think the farce that has been going on in Scotland over the past weeks—the SNP's great closing down sale—cannot get any worse, it has just offered a two-for-one offer of a coalition with Labour. Braveheart has turned out to be Brutus.

Anna Firth >

(Southend West) (Con)

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Hundreds—some reports say thousands—of blind and partially sighted people, such as my amazing disability campaigner Jill Allen-King OBE, face long waits of up to 18 months for replacement guide dogs. That is devastating for their mental health and their ability to socialise and, for some, their ability to work. May we have a debate in Government time on ways to improve access to work for blind and partially sighted people, and to guide dogs and modern technology, which make such a difference to their lives?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for that timely question. I know that she and her constituent recently met the Prime Minister, along with her constituent's companion Jagger, who I understand reluctantly faces retirement shortly. My hon. Friend is right that we want to increase access to that vital means for people to go about and achieve their ambitions in life. She has missed Women and Equalities questions this week, which happened yesterday, but I will follow up on this for her with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Ian Mearns >

(Gateshead) (Lab)

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I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement and for announcing Backbench business for the next two weeks. Can she help me with some words of consolation for my good friend Mr Mark Allen, who I took as my guest to St James's Park last Sunday? Mark is the proprietor of licensed premises known to me in Kennington, but he is also, sadly for him, a Tottenham Hotspur supporter. He is a very stoical supporter but, despite that stoicism, Sunday's events came as a bit of a shock. Can the Leader of the House say a word of consolation for him?

Tomorrow is Workers Memorial Day, when we commemorate all those killed, injured or made unwell by their work. Can we recognise 28 April every year to remember the dead and fight for the living?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for all the work he does with his Committee and the debates that we were able to announce in the business statement. I will commiserate with his friend and Spurs fans everywhere, who are familiar with coping with Spurs being a bit Spursy but have been tested to their limits. I wish them well for the future.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding us of the important memorial day. As a Portsmouth MP, I have a volume of constituents and family members who have suffered from mesothelioma and other related issues.

Darren Henry >

(Broxtowe) (Con)

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I would like to request that time be made available for the House to discuss the growing issue of houses in multiple occupation. In the towns of Beeston and Chilwell in my constituency, a growing number of HMOs are being approved by the Government following initial rejection by the local council. One of those HMOs resulted in contractors damaging a water main and multiple houses being destroyed as a result. Those decisions are having a huge impact on local families and communities and it is essential that time is made to discuss that increasing problem and ensure that such decisions are made for the community and not to its detriment.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point on an issue that will be of concern to many Members, particularly those in constituencies that are already very densely populated. He will know that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, and consultations done as part of its going through this House, looked at how we can ensure that we have the right type of houses in multiple

occupation; for example, young professionals who want to share accommodation might want separate bedrooms and bathrooms, but shared living rooms. We want to encourage the right kind of development that will enhance communities. I certainly encourage him, and all other Members who are concerned about the issue, to apply for a debate on the subject in the usual way.

Joanna Cherry >

(Edinburgh South West) (SNP)

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It is Lesbian Visibility Week. My alma mater, Edinburgh University, flew the lesbian visibility flag yesterday and advocated for inclusion, but last night it failed for a second time to stop a masked mob preventing the screening of a documentary called “Adult Human Female”. The film features feminists and lesbians, including my friends Dr **GRO-C**, **GRO-C** and **GRO-C**, talking about how important it is to be heard on the subject of their lesbian identity and experience. Can we have a debate about how we prevent lesbian erasure and the intimidation of lesbians in our civic life, including at our universities?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. and learned Lady for raising this important point, and may I say how sorry I am to hear that? It is incredibly important that we allow people to debate and discuss issues, and view films. It is incredibly disappointing to hear of people being presented with a situation that is intimidating, upsetting or violent. This is a particular issue for lesbians, because historically the LGBT movement has given them a lower profile than gay men, for example. It is incredibly important that we be very aware of these sorts of issues. I shall certainly make sure that the Minister for Women and Equalities and the Home Secretary hear her concerns.

Bob Blackman >

(Harrow East) (Con)

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I too was at St James’ Park, and I am still getting over it. At least Tottenham are refunding the gate money after that game.

Today is the 64th day that Vahid Beheshti is on hunger strike opposite the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Last week, together with 125 other Members of both Houses, I wrote to the Prime Minister about the hunger strike. The letter was copied to the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary, and drew attention to the plight of the poor people in Iran, and the need to proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in its entirety. I am pleased that Mr Beheshti had a meeting with Lord Ahmad and the Security Minister relatively recently, but there is still no action from the Government. Can we have a debate in Government time on what measures we will take to proscribe the IRGC in its entirety? Let us have a vote on that, so that the Government can support it and then make it actuality.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point. We are all extremely worried about the fact that Mr Beheshti is on the 64th day of his hunger strike. I visited him much earlier, in the first month of his strike. He is doing this not just because of the situation in Iran, I think, but also because of the situation that we increasingly face in the UK, with people being intimidated, threatened or worse by the regime and its proxies. I hope that he will soon bring the hunger strike to an end, but I understand why he is doing it. I am glad that Ministers have met him. The hon. Gentleman may wish to raise the matter again with the Foreign Secretary on 2 May.

Ellie Reeves >

(Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)

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One of my constituents has been part of the BBC Singers for 15 years and her husband is currently on trial with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which takes years of training and practice. They were just beginning to get their lives back on track after covid when the BBC announced it was closing the Singers and cutting orchestra jobs by 20%. Although that decision has been paused, their futures,

and those of these great cultural institutions, remain uncertain, so may we please have a statement from the Culture Secretary outlining what the Government will do to help save these jobs and protect our rich musical heritage?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady and all Members who have raised the matter particularly of the BBC Singers, which is the BBC's only choral group; the campaigning and concerns of Members of this House has greatly contributed to the BBC pausing that decision. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to continue to raise her concern about this; she will know we have just had Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions and I will make sure the Secretary of State has heard her continuing concern.

Virginia Crosbie >

(Ynys Môn) (Con)

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Adrienne Edwards, the Mayor of Holyhead is due to step down soon. She has given many years to Holyhead and has helped raise vital funds for the charity, Holyhead Cancer Support Group. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Adrienne and all those across the UK who go the extra mile to support their communities, and will she say pob lwc—good luck—to Adrienne for the coronation event she is organising in Llaingoch village hall on Sunday 7 May at 2 o'clock?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in saying thank you to Adrienne for all she has done, and also to say pob lwc for her future, particularly the coronation event she is organising. I also note that my hon. Friend has done her constituency a huge service in providing a mile of free bunting to anyone putting on a coronation event. Historically, because of political differences in the area, such bunting has not been readily available, and I am glad she has rectified that and hope everyone has a wonderful time.

Pete Wishart >

(Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)

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The Leader of the House's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) was just about as disastrous as her bellyflop in that daft diving contest she was part of, because we do need that debate on the real intentions about devolution, because we know they opposed its creation and we know they tried to undermine it over the past few years and have heard Lord Frost saying it now needs to be reversed. Will the Leader of the House tell me exactly what it is she does not like about a Scottish democratic institution that keeps rejecting Conservatives?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I am very proud of my bellyflop on “Splash!”: I have a lido to show for it, and although it has a considerable number of views on YouTube, that is dwarfed by the number of views I get for my exchanges with the Scottish National party every Thursday. I have no objection to democratic outcomes; I object to the Scottish National party's objection to democratic outcomes.

Alicia Kearns >

(Rutland and Melton) (Con)

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We in Rutland and Melton were recently successful with our £23 million levelling-up bid. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear!”] I know colleagues are very happy for me that that went ahead. As part of that, we will be building a medi-tech hub to build the technologies of the future to support our older loved ones to live safer for longer. Rutland County Council is currently Conservative and is also the

No. 1 rated council in the country for social care, despite being a very small council with a significant elderly population. Will my right hon. Friend advise me on how to secure a visit from the Minister for Social Care, because I am very keen that our model is rolled out around the country to improve social care for all?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on all she has secured for her community through the levelling-up fund and her work with her county council leader Lucy Stephenson to bring that £23 million into her constituency. I am very pleased to see that her local community is not resting on its laurels and is pressing forward with further innovation in this area, and she is right that it is wonderful to share best practice; it is one of the strengths we have in this place, and I shall certainly make sure that the Minister for Social Care has heard her invitation.

Gareth Thomas >

(Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)

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Monday's bank holiday will be warmly appreciated by hard-working families in Harrow—and, no doubt, in the rest of the United Kingdom—but 1 May will also be celebrated by many British Gujaratis as the day on which the state of Gujarat came into being in modern India. There are more than 800,000 British Gujaratis in all walks of life and in all parts of the UK. Will the Leader of the House take this opportunity, ahead of Gujarat day, to welcome the contribution that they make to our country?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for affording me that opportunity, and I am sure that his sentiments will be shared by everyone in the House in advance of this important anniversary. British Gujaratis do make a huge contribution to the nation and their local communities.

Nick Fletcher >

(Don Valley) (Con)

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Doncaster City Council does not maintain a register of derelict and empty buildings in my constituency or anywhere else, although we have plenty, such as the Old Police Station in Conisbrough, Tyram Hall in Blaxton, and various houses in Prince's Crescent, Edlington. Surely every council should maintain a register, require the owner of a building to sort it out if it is in disrepair, and then step in if the owner does not do so. How long must a community suffer the eyesore and blight of derelict buildings before the local authority comes to its aid? May we have a debate on this problem, which blights so many neighbourhoods?

Penny Mordaunt >

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Since 2017 local planning authorities in England have been required to maintain and publish brownfield land registers, and I am very disturbed to hear that that basic requirement is not being adhered to. We are committed to making the most of brownfield land in line with the national planning policy framework, but it is obviously hard to do that if sites are not identified. I shall make sure that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities knows about this, and ask his officials to provide some advice for the hon. Gentleman.

Jon Trickett >

(Hemsworth) (Lab)

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May I ask the Leader of the House to imagine the position of a family who are unable to acquire a house, then rent one, and suddenly—having put all their love and money and investment into that house—receive, with less than a month’s notice, a section 21 notice to quit from the landlord? That happened to my constituents Chris and Sandra Taylor, as was highlighted in the television programme ITV Calendar. May I just quietly say to the Leader of the House that Ministers, over the years, have made commitments to end this situation? As she looks to the next parliamentary Session and the King’s Speech, will she give an undertaking to the House that that loophole will finally be closed?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising an important point. As he will know, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Prime Minister are very focused on ensuring that those who are renting are protected. As well as the circumstances that he has described, there are knock-on effects for kids attending school. It is an incredibly difficult situation, but the hon. Gentleman knows that we are focusing on it, and we will continue to focus on it as we go into the fourth Session.

Andy Carter >

(Warrington South) (Con)

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The Manchester ship canal runs right through the middle of my constituency. There are three main A-roads crossing it, in addition to the M6 Thelwall viaduct, which opened 60 years ago this year. Three of the roads that cross the canal via swing bridges are regularly opened and boats pass through, but they are all controlled and owned by the ship canal owner, Peel Ports. This is regulated under the Manchester Ship Canal Act 1885, which set out the original obligations at a time when there were not many cars on the roads.

The bridges need urgent, essential repairs, but because the council and Peel Ports cannot agree on a closure schedule, they frequently break down and are stuck open, so cars cannot cross the canal. May we have a debate on reviewing the 1885 Act to ensure that the highways infrastructure in Warrington is no longer under the control of a business that is not playing its part in minimising delays and disruption in my town?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue, and for knocking heads together. It sounds as though the council and Peel Ports need to sit down and work this out for the benefit of all. If my hon. Friend’s question today has not had that result, he will know how to apply for an Adjournment debate, but I hope that that will not be necessary.

Marion Fellows >

(Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

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I am about to have an “Aw, mum” moment; when I go on about something, my children always use that phrase, and today I am going on about the redundancy modification order again. The Leader of the House very helpfully told me on 9 March that she and her noble Friend Lord True had

“met all the permanent secretaries...to make very clear the level of service we expect from their Departments”—[[Official Report, 9 March 2023; Vol. 729, c. 424.](#)]

I said on that occasion, “Let’s cut to the chase—it’s 10 years since this was looked at.” The addition of different organisations to the order has still not happened, and there are people all over the country waiting for it to, because it will affect them and—as always happens—their pensions. Please can we get this sorted?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady for her tenacity and determination on this issue. I will ensure that the relevant Secretary of State and perm sec have heard her concerns, and I shall also ask the Pensions Minister to contact her.

Scott Benton >

(Blackpool South) (Ind)

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There have been great strides in the field of low-carbon aviation in recent years, not least the development of hydrogen and electric aircraft. Given those developments, will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate on the role that regional airports such as Blackpool can play in not just improving regional connectivity but doing so while meeting our net zero commitments?

Penny Mordaunt >

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My hon. Friend raises a matter that is of concern to many people across the House, which is why we have shown our support for regional airports through the £161 million airport and ground operations support scheme that we provided during the pandemic. The Transport Secretary in particular is very focused on ensuring that we are developing and enabling our very important regional connectivity to thrive. My hon. Friend will know how to apply for a debate in the usual way.

Dame Diana Johnson >

(Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

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I wonder whether the Leader of the House might be able to help me. I know, having sat on the Intelligence and Security Committee, that there are some matters that the Government have to keep secret, but could I suggest that my written parliamentary questions to the Cabinet Office, asking how many meetings have been held between different Departments to discuss the **infected blood compensation** and who chairs those meetings, are of little interest to Vladimir Putin or any other hostile state? Might she be able to help me to get the factual information that I have requested in those written parliamentary questions?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I would be very happy to assist the right hon. Lady in getting those answers. I am aware of the particular situation and am already making inquiries with the Cabinet Office with regard to it. What the hon. Lady says is true with regard to any issue raised in this place, but I think in particular for those victims—those **infected** and affected by the **infected blood** scandal—it is doubly important that we have transparency, and demonstrate focus, pace and determination to get the situation resolved. I will be in touch with her later today.

Ben Everitt >

(Milton Keynes North) (Con)

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Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you and the Leader of the House will join me in wishing everybody in Milton Keynes a happy #LoveMK Day. But is not so rosy for many of my constituents, who are fed up with hitting pothole after pothole on our roads because the Labour-Lib Dem coalition council put just £100,000 aside for fixing potholes. I am pleased to have secured an extra £1.1 million from the Government, on top of the £2.8 million a year that the council already gets from the Government, to fix potholes on MK's roads. Is it time for yet another debate on potholes in this place, and will my right hon. Friend join me in urging the council to stop wasting millions of pounds of taxpayers' cash and to use this money to end the plague of potholes in Milton Keynes?

Penny Mordaunt >

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Happy #LoveMK Day to everyone celebrating it. I do not think the residents of Milton Keynes should love their council, though, by the sounds of it. Potholes are a blight on the motorist; that is why we are investing £200 million in maintaining and improving roads and filling in those potholes. I understand that my hon. Friend's council has spent £11 million on placing moss on the walls of the town hall. That seems a bizarre priority, and it has provided no upside to the public—other than, perhaps, providing an amusing metaphor for the most undynamic council that that place has seen.

Dr Philippa Whitford >

(Central Ayrshire) (SNP)

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A constituent of mine discovered in November that His Majesty's Revenue and Customs had handed over £972 to the company Mortgagesmiths, which took almost half of it in commission fees. As he had not commissioned the company in the first place, he demanded to see the application form. It was such a poor forgery that both his and his wife's signatures were clearly in the same handwriting. With the Government repeatedly warning the public not to fall for financial scams, it is incredible that HMRC fell for that one. Can we have a Treasury statement so that we can understand the extent of the problem, what is being done to prevent it in future and when constituents such as mine will get their money from HMRC?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady for raising that case; I am very sorry to hear it. She may wish to raise it at Treasury questions on 9 May but, given that that is a sizeable chunk of money for her constituent to be out of pocket, I will certainly raise it today with HMRC and ask it to contact her about it.

Selaine Saxby >

(North Devon) (Con)

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The Government committed to bringing forward a consultation on the regulation of rehoming activities for animal sanctuaries and rehoming organisations this year. Dogs Trust, which operates in my constituency, is keen that that should take place. Might my right hon. Friend grant Government time for a debate on the issue, or advise me of other ways to expedite the consultation? I know other colleagues will be as concerned as I am by the possible mistreatment of dogs in non-regulated establishments and the effect they are having on the legitimate rehoming centres that do such fantastic work.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for all the work she has done in championing this issue and in supporting Dogs Trust, which does a huge amount of good work in this area. She will know that the action plan for animal welfare includes commitments to pursuing the licensing of animal sanctuaries and rescue and rehoming centres for cats, dogs and horses; I will certainly ensure that the relevant Department hears her concerns.

Rachael Maskell >

(York Central) (Lab/Co-op)

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Residents of Acomb and Westfield were hopeful about York's £5.8 million shared prosperity fund award for much-needed regeneration, but then horrified to wake up to find that £400,000 of it had been squandered on a half-paved high street barricaded by 136 bollards. Can we have a statement on how the Government are scrutinising that much-needed fund? York residents want to know why York's Lib Dem and Green councillors have been allowed to waste even more public funding on a barricade of bollards.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I am sorry to hear that. The hon. Lady will know that, as well as the checks and balances in place for awarding the funding, there are evaluation works that go on. I am sorry that that is not delivering a better impact for her local residents. I shall ensure that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities hears her concerns, as the next questions are not until 5 June, and I encourage the local authority to ensure that it is doing something worthwhile with the sizeable chunk of money that it has secured.

Giles Watling >

(Clacton) (Con)

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Yesterday, I attended a very touching moment at the Cenotaph to mark the 108th anniversary of the genocide in Armenia. That poor, benighted country has shrunk over many years and decades. There has been an ongoing fight in the Nagorno-Karabakh region for decades, and the Lachin corridor is being ineffectively policed by Russian so-called peacekeepers. Some 120,000 people in the region are undernourished and not getting supplies. Will it be possible to have a debate on this issue in Government time?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

My hon. Friend will not have long to wait to raise this with the Foreign Secretary, as the next Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office questions are on 2 May. I am pleased he was able to attend the event he mentioned, and Parliament will have an inward visit from Armenia in the not-too-distant future. I will make sure the Department has heard him, and I encourage him to attend on Tuesday.

Wera Hobhouse >

(Bath) (LD)

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Not a week goes by without high-profile allegations of workplace sexual harassment hitting the headlines, of which the CBI is just the latest example. My private Member's Bill to protect workers from harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace has cross-party and, crucially, Government support. It has passed all its Commons stages, and it was expected to pass through the House of Lords unopposed. However, three rebels have tabled amendments and the Bill is now stuck in the other place. The Government have assured me of their continued support, and they are working hard to find a solution. If a solution to the impasse is found, we will need a small amount of extra time in this place to resolve the Bill's remaining stages. Will the Leader of the House and the Government Whips support me in finding that extra time so that this important Bill to protect workers from harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace can pass into law?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

Yes, we support the Bill, and the hon. Lady will know that discussions are ongoing. Ministers are engaging with their lordships and others who have raised concerns. She has my assurance that the business managers are alive to this matter, and we will do all we can to ensure these important measures are able to be considered.

Simon Baynes >

(Clwyd South) (Con)

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Will my right hon. Friend facilitate a debate on greater restrictions on off-road motorcycling, which is causing huge problems on rural lanes and in rural communities in my constituency, particularly in the Ceiriog valley? These problems are being caused by people from miles away, and they are leaving the council tax payers of Wrexham to pick up the bill for repairing the roads.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I am sorry to hear of that situation. Most issues involving greenlaning stem from illegal use, and they are a matter for enforcement by the local police. We have provided the police, local authorities and other agencies with a number of powers and tools to respond quickly to such antisocial behaviour, and to reduce the environmental impacts that my hon. Friend describes. The next Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions are on 25 May, and the next Home Office questions are on 22 May. I hope he will use both opportunities to raise this case.

Charlotte Nichols >

(Warrington North) (Lab)

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In the two years since this Government recklessly disbanded the Industrial Strategy Council, other economies with a more proactive approach to decarbonisation, artificial intelligence and automation, sciences such as genomics and cyber are fast overtaking us. Not only are we not a world leader in the technologies in which we should and could be a world leader, but we are barely even a world follower at this point. In recent weeks, countries such as Sweden have showcased to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee fully zero-carbon steel and battery gigafactories at commercial scale, on which this country has no realistic pathway even to begin work. When will we see substantial Government time for horizon scanning for an industrial strategy that is fit for the future, instead of tinkering around the edges as we get left further behind?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I disagree with the hon. Lady's description of what is happening in those growth sectors. I point her to the machinery of Government changes that the Prime Minister instigated to ensure science and tech are given the right profile in Whitehall. The Minister for Science, Research and Innovation is currently touring the UK, going to the new clusters to see what more we can do to ensure that we make use of every opportunity. As the hon. Lady will know, there are questions to the Department next week; I encourage her to ask for more information from the team.

Simon Fell >

(Barrow and Furness) (Con)

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Local staff at BBC Radio Cumbria are rightly concerned about proposals to slash services. There are plans for hours of content to go, as well as our only full-time journalist. Morale in the team is at rock bottom. At best, the plans put forward by the BBC will mean that the popular drive-time show is more likely to cover Accrington than Askham. At the weekend, when people tune into the breakfast show, it will cover Manchester, Liverpool, Cumbria and Lancashire—I struggle to see what is local about that.

This is the BBC turning its back on local communities such as those in Barrow and Furness. Will my right hon. Friend agree to a debate in Government time so that Members across the House can share their views about the shadow of a service that the BBC seems to want to leave behind?

Penny Mordaunt >

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My hon. Friend raises an important matter. Local broadcasting is vital not just in strengthening a community, in getting messages and news out, but as an important tool to protect democracy. I understand why my hon. Friend has raised it and why he is working so hard to make sure that the BBC really understands the impact of some of these changes. The issue would be an excellent topic for a debate; the concerns will be shared by many Members. I encourage him to apply for a debate in the usual way.

Martin Docherty-Hughes >

(West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)

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The Chair of the Backbench Business Committee rightly highlighted International Workers' Memorial Day tomorrow, when we will commemorate those who we have lost through injury or death in the workplace or due to their job—including the former, and now late, Member for Halifax, who died from malignant mesothelioma; I do not know whether the Leader of the House knows that the coroner attributed that in part to exposure to asbestos in this very House.

Does the Leader of the House agree with Clydebank Asbestos Group, the West Dunbartonshire joint trade union group, the STUC and TUC that, building on the commemorations tomorrow, there should be Government time to debate and vote to enhance workers' safety across these islands?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman again for raising this important memorial day and the sad case he referred to. There is obviously huge concern in the House of Commons Commission and the other place while we consider restoration and renewal proposals for this building. I will certainly make sure that the relevant Departments have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. He will know how to apply for a debate—given that the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee has also raised the issue, that might be his first port of call.

Mark Fletcher >

(Bolsover) (Con)

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A number of constituents have written to me in recent weeks pointing out that fuel prices at forecourts in my constituency seem to be higher than others of the same brands nearby, and that the prices in my constituency seem to drop at a slower rate. I have previously written to Tesco about its forecourt in Clowne; it said that it determines the cost of fuel with reference to the prices set by nearby forecourts. My constituency runs alongside the M1, and there are two service stations within those nearby forecourts; that artificially increases the fuel prices in what is also a rural area. May we have a debate on the cost of fuel and whether fuel providers are passing on the benefits of falling fuel prices—or profiteering in rural and poorer constituencies?

Penny Mordaunt >

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This incredibly important issue is a concern to many across the country. FairFuelUK is running the PumpWatch campaign, for example—an initiative supported by *The Sun* and other media. That shows that readers, viewers and listeners are concerned to ensure that there is fairness at the pump.

The Government welcome the Competition and Markets Authority's decision to investigate this matter, and we will carefully consider any recommendations it makes. It is important to ensure that companies and individual motorists are not being overcharged and that there is fairness in the system.

Andrew Gwynne >

(Denton and Reddish) (Lab)

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The Leader of the House may well be surprised to learn that her Cabinet colleague the Secretary of State for Transport is named as legally responsible in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for keeping England's roads on the strategic road network clean from litter and tipping. I say that she might be surprised by that because some of the dirtiest roads in the country are those operated by National Highways, including the M67 and M60, which run through my constituency. I reported the state of cleanliness of those roads to National Highways, only to be told that they were judged to be grade B, which meant that no action was required. They are utterly filthy and would be grade D at best if the local authority had judged them. What is the Secretary of State going to do to reassure Members of this House? May we have a statement on the cleanliness of National Highways' roads?

Penny Mordaunt >

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The hon. Gentleman has raised an important matter and I shall make sure that that Department has heard his concerns, given that its next questions is not until June. Clearly, there are statutory duties that certain organisations have. These things are also best solved in partnership with local authorities. I know that that is what local councils do, but I will make sure that the Secretary of State has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Drew Hendry >

(Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)

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May I underline the importance of International Workers' Memorial Day and the need for reflection on those killed, injured, or made disabled or unwell? I will be attending, with the Inverness and District Trades Union Council and others, a memorial event to reflect on those who are killed through their service to others during their work, as well as a rally on Saturday. May we have a debate in Government time on the need for further protection for workers, to give the Government the opportunity to change tack and support such enhancements?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of this important memorial day. He is the third Member to do so, and I certainly hope the event he is attending goes well. As I have said before, I will make sure that the relevant Departments focused on these matters—there are more than one—have heard that Members have raised this matter today.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck >

(South Shields) (Lab)

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GRO-A from South Shields committed suicide last year while on leave from a mental health hospital in the Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust. **GRO-A**'s inquest found that

“appropriate precautions were not in place to prevent him from doing so.”

The coroner subsequently sent the trust a regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths, with recommendations for improvement. The trust disagrees with the coroner's findings and is not obligated to act on them. May we please have an urgent debate on the effectiveness of regulation 28 reports?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

The hon. Lady raises a very important matter, and I will certainly make sure that the Secretary of State has heard her concerns. I have heard other Members raise it with particular regard to that provision. The hon. Lady will know how to apply for a debate in the usual way, perhaps through the auspices of the relevant all-party group.

Carol Monaghan >

(Glasgow North West) (SNP)

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This week is the 10th anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster, where 1,138 garment workers in Bangladesh were killed when the factory collapsed. Union workers had to dig through the rubble to find out what labels were involved, and it was found that brands sourced in UK shops such as Primark, Mango, Matalan and Benetton were but some of them. Many countries are moving to a situation where companies have responsibility for supply chains, so may we have a debate in Government time about the need for legislation to introduce strong legal frameworks for corporate accountability?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady for bringing to our attention the 10th anniversary of that terrible and sad event. She will know that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has done a huge amount of work to ensure that the likelihood of such events happening again is reduced by having good practices in garment factories across countries that we work with. We have also worked with the UN to introduce a number of measures to strengthen transparency in supply chains, but she is absolutely right: there has to be accountability for that. The Foreign Secretary is sitting on the Front Bench, but I will also ensure that the Department for Business and Trade is focused on the issues that she raises.

Clive Efford >

(Eltham) (Lab)

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The Immigration Minister said at the Dispatch Box that the Government inherited a backlog of 460,000 asylum claims from the last Labour Government. Using figures supplied to him by the Immigration Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Sir Chris Bryant) has been able to demonstrate that the figure is fewer than 19,000. Should the Immigration Minister not come back to the Dispatch Box, as required by the ministerial code, to correct the record? What can the Leader of the House do to ensure that the record is corrected, either today or as soon as we return after the weekend?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter. He knows that he can raise it in a point of order, but I have to say that I do not recognise the figures that he cites. Ministers do correct the record if they have not given the correct figures at the Dispatch Box, and that is what should happen, but I do not think that that is the situation in this case. What we should all be focused on in this place is ensuring that we can take forward the legislation that this Government are proposing, so that we can strengthen and make more effective the systems that deal with these very vulnerable people.

Kevin Brennan >

(Cardiff West) (Lab)

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If the Leader of the House really is keen on debates on the Government's record on sewage, I hope she will timetable some more in Government time, because then we could point out that after 13 years of Tory government, with falling real wages and the shocking state of our rivers, we have gone from the affluent society under Labour to the effluent society under the Tories.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

How very droll. I am reluctant to have a debate where we could compare the Labour party's record in government with our record in government on this matter only because I would not be able to take part in it. When I took my seat from Labour in 2010, raw sewage was running through the households and gardens on Portsdown Hill; it was contaminating land that animals grazed on, threatening their health. Despite being the only island city in the UK, we did not have any effective sea defences; we had major flooding. Thanks to the investment that has gone into my constituency, which totals hundreds of millions of pounds, we now have beautiful sea defences that are not just protecting the insurance payers of Portsmouth but promoting biodiversity. We have new pumping stations. We have repaired the damage to the sewerage system. We now have all storm overflows monitored—the figure was just 6% when I took over the seat—and by 2030, we will have eliminated storm overflows from the Solent.

Alex Davies-Jones >

(Pontypridd) (Lab)

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The Leader of the House may not know that the Royal Mint, which makes all the coins in circulation across the UK, is proudly located in my constituency. The Royal Mint is a key local employer, and we must ensure a sustainable future for highly skilled jobs in Llantrisant, particularly in our circulating coin industry, given the rapid rise of a cashless society. Can she help me to secure a meeting with her colleague, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, to discuss this further?

Penny Mordaunt >

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The hon. Lady's question affords me the opportunity to thank her constituents. The Royal Mint has been very busy recently, for various reasons, and I thank them for their role in the important events that are coming up. I would be happy to ensure that the Economic Secretary hears her request for a meeting and to do what I can to facilitate that. She will also know that the relevant questions are on 9 May, so she will not have long to wait for that.

Margaret Ferrier >

(Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)

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This week, I was to meet the Minister with responsibility for energy consumers and affordability to discuss long-standing green deal casework. Two hours before the meeting, it was cancelled, and no replacement meeting was offered until the Leader of the House promptly stepped in. That was not the first time Ministers have cancelled meetings on this issue. Will she schedule a debate in Government time on the lack of adequate support for unresolved Home Energy and Lifestyle Management green deal cases?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I am sorry to hear about this situation, although the hon. Lady kindly mentions that I have already intervened on the matter. The Minister cancelled due to votes and a Westminster Hall debate that they were involved in, but they have reiterated today that they are very keen to meet the hon. Lady, and I will ensure that that takes place.

Jim Shannon >

(Strangford) (DUP)

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On Tuesday past, an orthodox church in Ukraine's Kherson region was destroyed by a guided bomb. The church became one of hundreds destroyed by recent strikes, but significantly, according to President Zelensky this week, the use of such munitions shows a new development of the deliberate targeting of churches by Russia—an attack by Russia on the right to hold a religious belief. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, I take this opportunity to bring the matter to the attention of the House, and of the Leader of the House in particular, to see what we can do. Will she help to facilitate a meeting with a Minister to discuss the impact on freedom of religion and belief?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that appalling case. Churches and other places of worship are never legitimate targets in conflict situations. It is further evidence, I am afraid, of the appalling atrocities and war crimes that Russia is waging against civilians in Ukraine. I thank him for drawing the House's attention to the matter, and will certainly ensure that Ministers have heard what he has said.