

🕒 10.35am

Lucy Powell >
(Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)

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Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons >
(Penny Mordaunt)

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The business for the week commencing 11 March will include:

Monday 11 March—Continuation of the Budget debate.

Tuesday 12 March—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

Wednesday 13 March—Consideration of an allocation of time motion, followed by all stages of the National Insurance Contributions (Reduction in Rates) (No. 2) Bill.

Thursday 14 March—Estimates day. There will be debates on estimates relating to the Department for Education, in so far as it relates to special educational needs and disabilities provision; and the Home Office, in so far as it relates to asylum and migration. At 5 pm, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

Friday 15 March—Private Members’ Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 18 March includes:

Monday 18 March—Proceedings on the Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill.

Tuesday 19 March—Remaining stages of the Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill [Lords].

Further business will be announced in the usual way.

Lucy Powell >

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This week, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology made a grovelling apology and retracted baseless allegations she made against a member of her own advisory body on her personal Twitter account—allegations that were based on a dodgy dossier produced by a Conservative think-tank. Remarkably, the damages paid out came from taxpayers’ money from her Department. This is a new low for ministerial standards, so perhaps the Leader of the House can clarify a few things. Was the

of State was given appropriate advice, but did she follow it, or were her accusations against the advice she received? If they were, surely she should personally pay the costs.

Will the Leader of the House urgently ensure that the Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament? The Government cannot have it both ways: if the money was paid by taxpayers because it related to the Secretary of State's ministerial responsibilities, she must come to Parliament as a Minister and account for that. Other Ministers were told that their Twitter accounts were matters for them personally. Does the Secretary of State still have the confidence of the Leader of the House?

All we got from yesterday's Budget was old news, briefed and leaked to the papers before it was given to Parliament. The next time that the Leader of the House cries crocodile tears for the rights of this place, she could reflect on the Government's failure to stand by the parliamentary convention that Budgets are delivered in the Chamber first. I am sure that she was relieved that her marginal constituency did not get a namecheck, because her colleagues were all complaining that their namecheck was the kiss of death.

On the substance, the verdict is now in. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that tax receipts as a proportion of GDP are set to rise to their highest level since the second world war. The Resolution Foundation says that the big picture has not changed: taxes are heading up, and this will be the first Parliament in modern history in which living standards fall to be lower at the end than they were at the start. The Institute for Fiscal Studies agrees that households are worse off since the last election, and no sooner had the Chancellor sat down than the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), criticised a key plank of the energy plans on Twitter.

The public's verdict is also in. A snap poll revealed that three in five voters think that the Government's plan is not working. The Sky News panel of 2019 Tory voters could not have been more damning: one voter said that the Budget was "absolutely farcical". Another said that the Government have "no plans", and thought that the Budget was "a great vote loser" and "A waste of time";

"time for them to go",

said a third. That is because on the big issues, this Budget changes nothing.

On taxes, for every 5p the Government are giving, they are taking 10p in tax rises. Millions more middle-income families are paying more and more tax on their earnings, as they are dragged over higher tax thresholds. Taxes are going up to their highest level in 70 years; the Government hate it, but that is the reality. That is the truth of this Conservative Government. On the public finances, borrowing has been revised upwards, with the Chancellor's measures in the Budget adding £4 billion to borrowing, and debt as a share of GDP at its highest since the 1960s. Borrowing to fund tax cuts—how irresponsible.

On growth, after everything the Chancellor announced was taken into account, growth forecasts were revised down from November. Growth figures would have been even worse were it not for higher predictions of net migration. The Government hate that too, but is the truth. We are in a recession; the economy is smaller than when the Prime Minister entered Downing Street, there has been the biggest fall in living standards since records began, and real incomes are below what they were at the last election. That is the Conservatives' record, and it has the Prime Minister's name written all over it.

Finally, disgracefully, the Chancellor made no mention at all of **infected blood** compensation or Horizon scandal redress. The slowness in righting these wrongs is raised here most weeks. The Business and Trade Committee's highly critical report, out this morning, calls for a legally binding timetable for delivering redress to sub-postmasters, and for that to be taken completely out of the hands of the Post Office. Does the Leader of the House agree? Given everything she has said on both these injustices, does she understand the anger that no new money was allocated, and no timetable was given, for those compensation schemes in yesterday's Budget? Was not that omission just another short-term, cynical act that will store up problems for the next Government to sort out? As ever, it is party before country. These are the final acts of a desperate, dying Government.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I start by noting that tomorrow is International Women's Day. I point out that on most Thursdays, the primary players in this session are three women, and sometimes there is a fourth in the Speaker's Chair. It is sometimes noted that women are often the last to speak in meetings. That may be true, but we are often the first to set the right tone and approach. Politics needs more of us, and I hope that the spirit of tomorrow will carry into this important political year.

hon. Lady can no doubt obtain from the Department details of some of the issues that she raised. However, I remind the House, because the hon. Lady was really probing the character of the Secretary of State, that when the latter was entitled to a redundancy payment of £16,000 for having been a Secretary of State, she did not take it, but handed it back to the Department, because that was the right thing to do. That speaks volumes about my right hon. Friend's character, and how much she values the fact that we are talking about taxpayers' money.

I see that the hon. Lady is channelling Elmer Fudd this morning. Bugs may not have been in the Chancellor's hat, but there was support for businesses large and small, help for households, tax cuts for working people, and help for single-earner families. Also, the price of fuel at the pump is being held down through another fuel duty freeze. We will ensure that the benefit of that is handed on to the consumer via Pumpwatch.

I will not take any lectures from the Labour party on stewardship of public services and getting growth into our economy. I will take no lectures on tax cutting from a Labour party that still has £28 billion of unfunded spending commitments, which can only be delivered through tax rises. It was the Labour party that left office with a £71 billion black hole in the defence budget and equipment programme. It was Labour that brought in the fuel duty escalator, and is clobbering the motorist in Wales and London. It is the Labour party in Wales that has cut the NHS budget, not once, but three times. That is in contrast to the increases that we have brought in, and the further £6 billion announced yesterday. Labour's NHS budget cuts are one reason why a quarter of the population in Wales is on a waiting list.

I will not take any lectures from Labour on council tax, which rose by 104% under their Administration; again, in Wales, it has nearly tripled since Labour has been in power. We have reformed welfare to make work pay, doubled the personal allowance, cut national insurance and protected livelihoods and jobs through furlough, but Labour thinks it is a good use of taxpayers' money to give asylum seekers £1,600 a month. I will not take any lectures on supporting those earning the least from a Labour party that brought in the 10p rate.

The hon. Lady's rhetoric on growth and modernising our nation does not match her party's agenda to unpick 40 years of trade union reform or tie businesses in red tape, and it does not sit well with its voting record on minimum service levels for the British public. I will not take any lectures from a party that did the square root of diddly squat for victims of **infected blood** and the Post Office. On that precise point, the hon. Lady clearly has not read the Red Book, which on page 24 commits us to paying full compensation to victims of the Horizon scandal. The estimates are in there, but it also says that amount will be increased if needed.

This is a tough shift, post-pandemic and mid-war. But thank God it is our shift. Our country has turned a corner and we will get back to our inflation target soon, as the new forecasts indicate. The plan is working and we will stay that course, as we must. Otherwise, we will end up back where Labour left us: compared with today, that is a million more workless households, 400,000 more children and 200,000 more pensioners in absolute poverty, 4 million fewer in work, youth unemployment at 45%, literacy rates trailing rather than leading the world, and a third less spending on the NHS. No thank you, shadow Leader of the House. We will stick with the Prime Minister. Further business will be announced in the usual way.

James Daly >

(Bury North) (Con)

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The Mayor of Greater Manchester's vanity project of a 493-square-mile clean air zone has cost the taxpayer nearly £100 million. It has been supported by all Labour councils in Greater Manchester and Bury. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate to ensure that the voices of Conservative MPs who have campaigned against this ridiculous project can be heard again, and that this tax on hard-working people never sees the light of day?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on leading the charge on this matter. There is a legal obligation to comply with emissions in the shortest possible time, but we are reviewing that. He will know that Greater Manchester authorities have changed their tune and are now proposing an entirely different approach, thanks to the campaign that he has run and the support that he has galvanised among his communities. I congratulate him and encourage him to hold them to account.

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I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

Richard Thomson >

(Gordon) (SNP)

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Following the frankly appalling behaviour of the Labour party leadership to disrupt the SNP's Opposition day debate on 21 February —[*Interruption.*] Obviously, they do not like the truth. The Leader of the House told the House that she was sympathetic to the idea not only of the SNP getting another Opposition day debate but of taking it from the allocation given to the Labour party. Could she update the House on how her thinking has developed on those points?

Further to that, on the issue of ministerial responsibility, yesterday it was revealed that neither the Conservatives' branch manager in Holyrood nor their Energy Minister supports the Government's energy policy. Will the Leader of the House confirm whether the principle of collective responsibility in government applies to junior Ministers? If so, what advice would she give to any Minister who is unable to support such a key plank of Government policy, either publicly or in any Budget votes ahead?

Finally, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology has cost the taxpayer £15,000 after falsely accusing an academic of supporting Hamas. Could we have a debate on the limits of privilege, specifically whether it is now the Government's policy that Ministers can say whatever they like outside Parliament and be financially indemnified from the consequences by the taxpayer? Does she consider it the taxpayer's job to underwrite financially the Conservative party's culture wars whenever its members overstep the mark?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions. I have spoken to the leader of his party in Westminster regarding future Opposition day debates, and he knows that we will give more time to the SNP. I think SNP Members were badly treated and we will make that right. As I have explained, I also want to ensure that the Procedure Committee looks at what happened, because I do not want minority parties to receive more time on the Floor of this House and be in any doubt about how those debates will be conducted. I understand that Mr Speaker has written to the Procedure Committee to ask it to do a quick piece of work, and I will announce future Opposition-day debates for the SNP. I hope SNP Members will have confidence in what the Procedure Committee says.

The hon. Gentleman raised particular Budget measures. We have a balanced Budget—that is why the Chancellor made the decisions that he made. It is the Government's Budget and the Government's plan. It is rather cheeky of the hon. Gentleman to lecture us about use of public funds; I refer him to what I said earlier about the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. The SNP is legendary in this respect. Indeed, I had wrongly assumed that the appalling Willy Wonka experience in Glasgow had been laid on by the SNP, given its high-cost poor return, and the fact that the police were called. However, the presence of a bouncy castle put paid to that theory, given that bouncy castles have been banned by SNP local authorities on health and safety grounds.

Dame Karen Bradley >

(Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)

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The lives of people across north Staffordshire have been blighted for far too long by the stench coming off Walleys Quarry landfill site in Newcastle-under-Lyme. There is delight that the Environment Agency has now issued a suspension notice, so will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to our hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) for the work he has done on this incredibly important issue? Given that this issue affects communities up and down the country, including yours, Mr Speaker, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on landfill sites?

Penny Mordaunt >

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too long, had to put up with the appalling smells emanating from that quarry, and she is right to pay tribute to our hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme. He has raised the issue many times in this House and has been fighting for his constituents. I think he secured two Westminster Hall debates on the issue, and it is in very great part down to his efforts that it is being resolved.

Mr Speaker >

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I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Ian Mearns >

(Gateshead) (Lab)

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May I thank the Chair of the Procedure Committee for a timely and affirmative response to our request to examine the Westminster Hall Standing Orders? To that end, I have written to the Leader of the House this morning, and I hope she will give a similarly timely and affirmative response. The Backbench Business Committee welcomes applications from Members across the House, particularly for Westminster Hall debates, where they can probably be facilitated after the Easter recess as we are pretty booked up until then.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I again thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful advert for his Committee. He knows that I very much agree both with his ask and with the advice of the Procedure Committee, so we will make that good innovation very swiftly.

Theresa Villiers >

(Chipping Barnet) (Con)

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May we have a debate on defending the environment and quality of life in the London suburbs? Transport for London and its development partner Ballymore want to build 25 tower blocks in Edgware town centre, including a 29-storey skyscraper, which is completely unacceptable and inappropriate. We need a debate to make the point to the Mayor of London that he must demand that TfL withdraw from the project.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that issue. All communities want to ensure that new homes are built—that is very important—but we must ensure that they are the right type of homes and do not affect the character of an area, and that the needs of local people and their views are taken into account. I know my right hon. Friend has been campaigning hard on such matters, and that the development must be to a gentler density that is in keeping with the local character. I congratulate her and the Save Edgware campaign, which is working flat out to ensure that the character of that community remains. I stand ready to assist her as she progresses that campaign.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy >

(Streatham) (Lab)

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This week, on 9 March, it will be 10 years since the death of my dear friend, **GRO-A**. She was just 28 years old. **GRO-A** had sickle cell anaemia, the UK's fastest growing genetic condition, but her untimely death was the direct result of serious failings in her care. Her experience and those of many others are outlined in the landmark report by the Sickle Cell Society and the all-party parliamentary group on sickle cell and thalassaemia, "No One's Listening", published in 2021, but since then the Government have failed meaningfully to engage with its findings and recommendations. It cannot be right that 10 years after we lost **GRO-A** those

we expect the Government to finally listen and put forward policy that implements in full the recommendations of the “No One’s Listening” report?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady for remembering her friend **GRO-A** and allowing us to pause and pay tribute to her. I thank her also for raising the important work the APPG did on the matter. As the next Health questions will not be until late April, I will write on behalf of the hon. Lady to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and ask her to respond directly to her.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger >

(Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)

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May we have a debate in Government time—it would be nice—to talk about Mid Devon District Council? I know I have talked about it before, but it has now gone beyond a joke. There are now no planning enforcement officers in Mid Devon District Council, as all the staff have gone. It is a free-for-all for developers. More importantly, the council have moved to waste collection every three weeks. That is not a problem, except the service has been taken over by a draconian “1984”-style group of councillors who are determined to make the lives of the people of Tiverton and mid-Devon impossible. The chair of scrutiny, who is incompetent and lazy, is doing nothing to scrutinise any of this. We cannot have local government being run by people who seem to be out to make the lives of local people miserable, so please may we have a debate on local government?

Penny Mordaunt >

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It is sometimes said that in response to questions I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago, but my hon. Friend could stand up every week and refer me to the question he asked the week before. He is assiduous in his campaigning to highlight the failures of his local authority, and I expect to see him doing exactly the same thing next week.

Wera Hobhouse >

(Bath) (LD)

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Passengers must feel confident when making train journeys. In the last two weeks alone, there were major cancellations on South Western Railway, as well as mass delays on Southern and Thameslink. At the same time, rail fares rose by nearly 5% on Sunday. Everybody is paying more for less. Is it not high time we had a debate in Government time on how we can support our crumbling rail infrastructure?

Penny Mordaunt >

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The hon. Lady will know that the Department has made recent announcements on considerable uplifts to rail infrastructure. There have been particular issues with the service provided by South Western Railway and the quality of its rolling stock. The next Transport questions will not be for some time, so I will raise the hon. Lady’s concerns with the Secretary of State and ask that his officials get in touch with her.

Dr Matthew Offord >

(Hendon) (Con)

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However, Transport for London and the Mayor of London have decided that the works to upgrade Colindale tube station necessitate a six-month closure. That is dire for commuters but also for visitors to the RAF Museum. Will a Minister come to the Dispatch Box to advise what assistance can be provided to mitigate yet more unintended consequences from decisions made by the disastrous Mayor?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important point. The Royal Air Force Museum is amazing; I was there recently at the RAF gallantry awards dinner. At most times, such work would be very unfortunate for one of our most impressive national museums, but anniversaries coming up this year will mean more people will want to visit the museum, particularly to see the reconnaissance aircraft. This matter is devolved to the Mayor of London, but I know my hon. Friend has done service by getting the concerns of many people on the record. I will ensure the relevant Department has heard his concerns, to see what pressure can be brought to bear on Transport for London and the Mayor of London.

Rushanara Ali >

(Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)

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The Budget means net tax cuts of £9 billion taking effect in an election year, but that is dwarfed by the £27 billion of tax increases that took effect last year and the £19 billion of tax rises that will come into effect after the general election, because of the actions of her party. The Chancellor has given with one hand and taken with the other. Does the Leader of the House think that her party is fooling anyone?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I encourage the hon. Lady to re-read the Chancellor's Budget speech to see what progress we are making on growth and inward investment into this country. This year, our investment summit had a record amount of money being put into this nation, with more than £30 billion garnered in just that week. She will know that yesterday we had revised forecasts on returning to our target for inflation. These are tough times, but the plan is working, and we are determined to see hard-working families through.

Bob Blackman >

(Harrow East) (Con)

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Before the pandemic, Transport for London's finances were in a complete mess, because the Labour Mayor of London refused to raise fares in line with inflation. Now, after receiving from the Government the final instalment of the £6.2 billion to cover the covid period, he freezes fares again, refuses to pay the police the money they need to reform and keep London safe, and raises the council tax precept by 8.7%. Will my right hon. Friend arrange time for a debate so that we can point out the errors of the London Mayor and put us on course for proper government in London?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for again raising the appalling maladministration of the Mayor of London. Londoners are paying more to prop up the Mayor's budget, not just in the increased headline rates, but also in a whole series of stealth taxes and fines that are being levied. Even the most fundamental services in London, such as the police, have enormous black holes in their budgets. It is an absolute scandal, and I hope that Londoners will rectify that situation in the coming months.

Andy McDonald >

(Middlesbrough) (Ind)

The sorry saga of Teesworks continues, including the mysterious £20 million paid out to the joint venture partners over rubble. Putting to one side the bizarre hailing by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of Lord Houchen as Teesside's best champion since Sunderland won the FA cup in 1973—the Leader of the House might want to send him a map of the north-east—will she prevail upon him to come to the House and make a statement to explain how the £560 million of public money so far invested, which is providing eye-watering incomes for the joint venture partners without them putting in any money of their own, is in any way consistent with his claim that the remediation of the site was achieved by bringing in private investment? There has been no such private investment; the taxpayer has paid for the lot. Can she please ask the Secretary of State to come to the House and explain himself?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I dispute what the hon. Gentleman says, and I think it goes to the heart of his prejudices against private sector involvement. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the employment rate in Teesside is now 3% above the national average. I am sorry he does not welcome that success. We do, and we want it to continue.

Andrew Rosindell >

(Romford) (Con)

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The Leader of the House will be fully aware that I welcome the Prime Minister's remarks outside No. 10 Downing Street last week, when he said:

"It is not enough to live side-by-side, we must live together united by...a shared commitment to this country."

He is right. Immigration is only successful when integration is successful. In the light of that, will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on the Floor of the House concerning a new proactive integration strategy, ensuring that those who come to Britain are encouraged to learn English, become part of UK communities and embrace British values? Does she agree that we need a coherent UK integration policy?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point. The Home Office has done work in this area, and he will know that Departments have had initiatives, such as the Department for Levelling Up providing language classes and so forth. The Home Office has been focused on those who have leave to remain and choose to make their home here but are not citizens of this country, as well as looking at whether we need a more robust and proactive stance towards citizenship and all that it brings and means to us.

Ms Anum Qaisar >

(Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

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My constituent John, despite having been born in North Lanarkshire and having lived in Scotland his whole life, had to apply to become a British citizen, pledge his allegiance to the King and pay £260 for the process to apply for a passport because he does not have access to his mother's birth certificate. Will the Leader of the House make Government time available for MPs to raise and debate various passport issues? Is she aware of any recourse to allow my constituent to be reimbursed?

Penny Mordaunt >

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case and anything that the Department can learn from John's experiences of going through that process. He will know that we have clear line-of-sight reporting on the costs charged for particular things, but if there has been some injustice, I am sure that meeting will help to rectify the situation.

Sir Robert Buckland >

(South Swindon) (Con)

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Last week saw the launch of the independent report that I, together with the Department for Work and Pensions and the leading research charity Autistica, prepared as result of a 10-month review into autism and employment. There is still a huge gap in the number of people in work, with fewer than three in 10 adults who are autistic working, which is way below the disability average. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time in April for a debate in this Chamber on the report and its findings. Will my right hon. Friend use her good offices to ensure that that time is preserved as much as possible, so that colleagues across the House can debate the report's important recommendations?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for all the work he has done on the report and on many other areas of deep concern to people with autism and their families. It is a landmark report, and it is wonderful to hear that it will be debated on the Floor of the House. I will ensure that the time is protected and that nothing happens to it. I also congratulate my colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions on the work they have done and the proactive way in which they commissioned these findings.

Dame Diana Johnson >

(Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

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Yesterday, after the Budget, Kate Burt, the chief executive of the Haemophilia Society, said:

"Today, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt could have reassured those **infected** and affected by contaminated **blood** products that resources for long-overdue compensation would be made available. Instead, like so many Chancellors before him, he ignored this issue, deepening the anxiety, anger and frustration caused by his government's failure to take responsibility for this long-running injustice. We deplore this cowardly and morally bankrupt attempt to kick the payment of compensation beyond the next general election."

I know that the Leader of the House cares deeply about this issue and that she will be as disappointed as I am about the failure to put anything on it into the Budget.

Can we please have a statement from the Paymaster General about exactly what he is doing? He is not talking to those **infected** or affected, he is not taking soundings from any of the campaign groups, and he is appointing people to advise him but we are not allowed to know their names. It is time for a statement. It is time to know what the Government are actually doing.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the right hon. Lady for raising that important point, and I am very happy to set the record straight. It is not the intention to kick the can down the road on this issue. The Paymaster General and I have a weekly update on it, and he is working very hard. The right hon. Lady will appreciate that, of all this process, this is the hardest bit—coming up with the scheme in short order and ensuring that it will deliver for those who are **infected** and affected. I do not think the House will have to wait long before it is updated by the Paymaster General. He is planning a tour across the UK to meet particular groups, and I hope he will be able to update the right hon. Lady on that very swiftly. This is a moral issue, and we have taken it seriously. That is why we did the inquiry. That is why we did the compensation review. The Paymaster General will have to balance the issues the right hon. Lady raises against being swift. He feels that very deeply, and he will deliver for the House and all the victims.

(Northampton North) (Con)

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Tomorrow is International Women's Day, and today marks five months since the barbaric Hamas attack on Israel. Of the 134 hostages still cruelly held by Hamas, 19 are women, and of those, five are teenage girls. Will my right hon. Friend join me in marking International Women's Day by supporting the campaign called #BringBackOurGirls? Will she also take this opportunity to send a message to their families, who are enduring unimaginable pain and the living nightmare of these young women being in the hands of vicious rapist terrorists?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for affording the whole House the opportunity to send the message to all the hostage families that they are still very much in our thoughts. Of those women and girls still kept hostage, the youngest is 19 and the oldest is 70. We can only imagine the horrors they are facing. This week the UN published its report on the sexual violence suffered by Israeli women and girls on 7 October. It looked at over 5,000 photographs and over 50 hours of footage of those attacks, and it concluded that there was evidence at the Nova music festival of rape, gang rape and murder. It is the most appalling situation, and I am glad that the UN now has that evidence on record and has produced that report. We cannot let these poor women and girls suffer what they must be suffering a moment longer. We must bring them home, and I am sure that is the sentiment of everyone in the House.

Ashley Dalton >

(West Lancashire) (Lab)

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Constituents in West Lancashire have this week been deeply concerned about the threatened closure of our dial-a-ride service. Yesterday, I learned that, unlike Conservative-led Lancashire County Council, Labour-led West Lancashire Borough Council has managed to find some additional funds for this year, and dial-a-ride has announced that it will be able to continue for the next financial year. Could we please have a debate about the impact of over a decade of cuts to local government on the valuable community and voluntary sector, which all our constituents rely on?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

The voluntary and community sector is thriving, and 13 million Brits volunteer every single month. The services that the hon. Lady talks about are incredibly important. Different councils will be doing different things. Some have dial-a-ride services, and others have tokens for taxis, depending on whether they are urban or rural. This issue is incredibly important, and the hon. Lady will know that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has put an enormous focus on supporting the community and voluntary sector through new initiatives such as the national citizenship programme. However, I will ensure that the relevant Department has heard her concerns.

Paul Howell >

(Sedgefield) (Con)

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Further to the question from the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), my constituent **GRO-A** from **GRO-A** is one of the many who have been impacted by the **infected blood** scandal. I understand that we are nearing the final compensation settlement for victims of this appalling scandal. Will the Leader of the House please advise me on how people can best engage with Ministers on this subject?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

to bring forward proposals in swift order, but to meet directly with those who have been **infected** and affected, in order to hear their views and get feedback on the scheme to ensure that it meets with their approval. My latest information is that there will be 25 meetings around the country. I know that the Paymaster General feels strongly that that is the right thing to do. I will make sure that he has heard my hon. Friend's interest on behalf of his constituent and that my hon. Friend is updated as soon as those dates and venues can be announced.

Afzal Khan >

(Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)

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Manchester has a proud history of welcoming those seeking sanctuary, but the Home Office is failing to provide support for the move-on process to those recently granted asylum. Since April 2023, there has been a 575% increase in the number of people who have presented to Manchester City Council as homeless because the Home Office has evicted them. The Government expect local authorities and the voluntary sector to fill the gap that they are leaving, but without providing the resources. Councillor Craig, the leader of Manchester City Council, has written to the Secretary of State to raise the issue. Can we have an urgent debate in Government time on the support offered to newly recognised refugees?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I would be very happy to raise this matter with the Home Office and ask for a meeting on behalf of the hon. Gentleman. Local authorities have a great deal of flexibility on who they take, under what circumstances and where they provide accommodation, so I am not quite sure what the underlying issue is. I would be very happy to facilitate a discussion between the hon. Gentleman and the Home Office.

Martin Vickers >

(Cleethorpes) (Con)

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My right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) and I have a long-running campaign to restore the direct train service between Cleethorpes and King's Cross, which would serve our three constituencies. We know that the Department for Transport has approved that. The Budget Red Book has a couple of sections that could include that service. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Rail Minister to make a statement to clarify whether the Cleethorpes service is included?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my hon. Friend for all his work on this important service for his constituents, which will bring massive benefits to the area. I can absolutely confirm that we are committed to ensuring that the service is stood up. I understand that work is still required to assess what infrastructure changes are needed at the stations involved and that further operational readiness activities need to take place before direct services can be introduced. I will ensure that the Rail Minister has heard what my hon. Friend has said today and that he contacts him to give him assurances.

Stephen Kinnock >

(Aberavon) (Lab)

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It has been reported that taxpayers have had to pick up a £15,000 bill due to the actions of the right hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), who is rapidly becoming known as "the Member for Chipping In". Could the Leader of the House confirm that amount of £15,000? Does she think it fair that taxpayers should be footing the bill for the disgracefully bad judgment and behaviour of her colleague?

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As an experienced parliamentarian, the hon. Gentleman will know that each Department will have a permanent secretary and monitoring officer to ensure that any such payments are correct, proper and justified. The propriety and ethics team at the Cabinet Office also oversees such things. Not having been directly involved in the matter myself, I am pretty confident that what has happened is perfectly correct. What the hon. Gentleman is getting at is whether it is right. I point him to what that particular Secretary of State has done herself in other circumstances. She very much understands that taxpayers' money is involved and has taken action in the past to turn down things that she was entitled to because she felt that it was morally wrong to take them.

Christine Jardine >

(Edinburgh West) (LD)

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I hope the right hon. Lady knows that I am not a fan of the “go for the player rather than the ball” type of politics that is so popular with so many in this place, but following so many comments today, I have to say that, as public servants, we owe the public the right to question whatever we do. I fully respect what the right hon. Lady has said about the right hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) turning down payments, such as for her redundancy after two days as Education Secretary. However, the matter will not go away until the public have the right to ask questions.

There is also the issue of whether the ministerial code was breached in any of what has happened. The Prime Minister promised us a Government of transparency, so will the right hon. Lady please take back to him the suggestion that there should be a statement to the House to clarify the situation, if nothing else?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I completely understand the legitimate issues that the hon. Lady raises. She has a reputation for playing the ball and not the man or woman, and I take her question in the spirit in which I think it is intended. From what I know of the situation, and because of the oversight that is given to such matters, I believe that this issue has been dealt with in line with the rules. I refer her to what I have said about the character of the individual in question.

Marsha De Cordova >

(Battersea) (Lab)

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Listening to the Chancellor's Budget this week, people would think that everything is rosy, despite our country being in a recession. However, that narrative flies in the face of the daily reality of workers and businesses. Does the Leader of the House accept that the Government cannot escape from their dismal economic record over the last 14 years?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I would ask the hon. Lady to reflect on how she thinks the hard-working people of this country will cope with having to plug a £28 billion hole in Labour's spending plans, which could only be raised—if the party is sticking to its fiscal rules—by raising taxes.

Patricia Gibson >

(North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)

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Scotland's baby box is delivered to every baby born in Scotland. It is packed full of baby essentials to be used from birth to six months, helping parents to give their child a positive start in life. Scotland also has the largest free book giveaway for children of any nation on Earth through the Bookbug book gifting programme, giving every child four free packs of books between birth and primary 1. We also have the Scottish child payment of £25 a week per child for our poorest families. None of those things is available

ensuring that every child has the best start in life, recognising that it is the Government's job to address inequalities as much as they can, with the powers they have, to build a more cohesive and fairer society?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I have no quibble with any of the issues that the hon. Lady raises, but it is also the duty of Governments to ensure that people have public services they can rely on, that the police can attend burglaries and other such things, that people have access to the healthcare they need, and that their ambitions with regard to the growth of the economy and their local communities are supported. Unfortunately, her Government in Scotland are not doing those things.

Andrew Western >

(Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)

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My constituent **GRO-A** is a cancer survivor who has campaigned for years on access to NHS dentistry for cancer patients. I have made frequent attempts to secure a debate on this matter and will continue to do so, but will the Leader of the House allocate some Government time to discuss this important issue, given the traumatic impact chemotherapy can have on one's dental health and the incredibly significant impact that has on the lives of those who are able to survive cancer?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), who is the Minister with responsibility for dentistry, has brought forward a new dental plan, which includes an uplift but also new things for the NHS in England, such as mobile dentistry vans. She is particularly focused on people who are disproportionately affected because of other issues, including cancer patients, looked-after children, and women who were pregnant during the pandemic and could not access free dental care at the time. We have new opportunities with the new dental plan to ensure that everyone in our nation is dentally fit, including through changes to how payments are made. I think that a debate on this matter would be very welcome, and I know that the hon. Gentleman knows how to apply for one.

Andrew Bridgen >

(North West Leicestershire) (Ind)

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Public petition 648609 called for a debate on ending the UK's membership of the World Health Organisation, but a debate was refused by the Petitions Committee despite the petition well exceeding the 100,000 signature threshold. Can we please have a statement on why this House is determined to give away sovereign powers to an unelected, unaccountable, non-tax paying, diplomatically immune organisation whose current director general was appointed only through an unholy alliance of Bill Gates and the Chinese Communist party? Can the Leader of the House say why the WHO has joined excess deaths and vaccine harms on the list of things that we just cannot talk about in this House?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I think there are enough health-related issues, and all sorts of other issues, to worry about, focus on and debate without inventing crisis and drama where there is none. The hon. Gentleman acknowledges that petitions are a matter for the Petitions Committee, which is a Committee of this House. I am not responsible for its decisions. I will facilitate and help him to secure debates and raise questions, and to do anything else he wants to do, on any topic on which he wishes to campaign.

The hon. Gentleman will know, because he has secured well-attended debates in the past, that this House is very open to discussing all sorts of issues, including the World Health Organisation and the treaty about which I know he is concerned. Let us focus on the real issues, the substance and the matters at hand, rather than pretending that this House, anyone in it or any of its Committees has

Mr Barry Sheerman >

(Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)

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Does the Leader of the House agree that this is probably the most perilous time for the world during my long time in the House of Commons? Does she also agree that this House needs to be up to date on what is happening in the world? Last week, I had to watch the Foreign Secretary appear before the House of Lords on television to be informed of our foreign policy and what he is doing. I understand that no Conservative Member of Parliament seemed fit to be Foreign Secretary and that we had to go to the House of Lords, but can we have more regular debates and statements? It is not right for the elected House of Commons to have no Secretary of State to answer questions during these perilous times.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I implore the hon. Gentleman to recognise the merits of the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who has appeared at this Dispatch Box an enormous number of times, and to acknowledge that the Foreign Secretary, who obviously sits in the House of Lords, has made himself available to hon. Members on a raft of issues. He has particularly made himself available to those Members who have been affected by what is happening in Israel and Gaza.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the Procedure Committee has made further recommendations on how this House can scrutinise the Foreign Secretary, and I am sure the House of Lords will shortly take a decision on those recommendations.

Ruth Cadbury >

(Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)

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Despite yesterday's short-term tax cuts, families across the country know that they are worse off than they were 14 years ago, so will the Leader of the House urge the Prime Minister to call an election and let the British people give their views on this Government?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I am afraid that what the hon. Lady says is not the case. We have got an enormous number of people into work, and the best way for people to lift themselves out of poverty is through work. Two million of those 4 million people are women, and 1 million are disabled people who would not have had the dignity of a pay packet without our welfare reforms to make work pay and to support people in work.

We have an enormous childcare package that the previous Labour Administration went nowhere near. The number of pensioners living in absolute poverty has reduced by 200,000, and the number of children living in absolute poverty has reduced by 400,000. By any measure, the country is doing better. It will have more opportunities in future because of what we have done in education. We are soaring up the international literacy tables, and we have reformed post-16 education to enable people to get a degree without getting into massive amounts of debt, as happened under the hon. Lady's party. What she says is not true, which is why we need to stay the course and stick with this Government.

Kevin Brennan >

(Cardiff West) (Lab)

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Last week, I talked about my constituent **GRO-A** whose husband died as a result of the **infected blood** scandal. I know that the Leader of the House has a copy of the Red Book with her, as she mentioned that earlier. Can she point to the line in it that shows where the Chancellor has set aside any resource to deal with the compensation that she and he know will have to be paid as a result

scandal?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman will know that provision has been made for this, and the final scheme is being worked on. I can understand why people want to raise this issue; it is a moral issue and it stirs understandable passions. However, I just caution hon. Members to recognise—I believe they know this—that the scheme is about to be brought forward. I have already announced today that the Paymaster General will be going around the country to talk to people directly about that and the plans he is bringing forward. I care passionately about this issue, as I did when I gave evidence to the inquiry, and I do not want victims of this appalling scandal to worry about what is going to happen. I want us to be able to reassure them, so I hope I will be able to continue to do that every week. I ask hon. Members, who rightly want to know the detail of the scheme, to reflect that in the questions they ask both me and the Paymaster General.

Jim McMahon >

(Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op)

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Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Oldham Athletic football club owner Frank Rothwell on his sterling achievement in rowing the 3,000 miles across the Atlantic, in aid of Alzheimer's Research UK, in his 70s for the second time? He managed to raise more than £350,000 for that charity, adding to the £1 million he raised previously on the first row. Will she also allocate Government time for a debate on the real issue of the near 1 million people affected by Alzheimer's in the UK, and the funding and early diagnosis that supports work in that area?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

As the hon. Gentleman asked that question and revealed the full extent of his constituent's incredible achievement, there was an audible gasp, so I am sure the whole House will want to join him in congratulating his constituent on those amazing achievements. I am close to HMS Oardacious, the Royal Navy's rowing team, which regularly rows the Atlantic, so I am very familiar with the incredible ordeal that that is. Doing it at 70 years old is utterly remarkable, and I congratulate Frank deeply. I also thank the hon. Gentleman for raising his concerns about provision and care for those suffering from Alzheimer's. I shall make sure that the Health Secretary has heard what he has said.

Kirsten Oswald >

(East Renfrewshire) (SNP)

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I welcomed the Chancellor's announcement that he would be taxing vaping products, but I wonder why on earth this has to be left until 2026. It is disappointing that in the same week that Laura Young, also known as Less Waste Laura, was named as Scottish influencer of the year for her fantastic environmental campaigning, including on banning disposable vapes, this important tax measure has been so resoundingly kicked into the long grass. I am sure that the House would want to join me in congratulating Laura, but may we also have a debate in Government time on the imperative of moving with more speed on taxing vapes? Perhaps we will also be able to make time to discuss the wholly unacceptable practice of vaping companies sponsoring sports strips.

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Lady for getting her concerns on the record. I will raise that matter with both the Treasury and the Health Secretary. The hon. Lady will also know that we are also hoping to bring forward legislation shortly, which I am sure, given what she said, she would be happy to support.

(Stockton North) (Lab)

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My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) referred earlier to the gaffe by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, who demonstrated his ignorance while on a visit to Teesside, referring to the “heroes of Sunderland” who won the FA cup in 1973, when perhaps he should have been praising the 2004 League cup winners, Middlesbrough. Instead of ignoring the matter, can the Leader of the House arrange a humanities lesson for the Minister, so that he can better understand the history and geography of the north-east?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I take my responsibilities to all Members of this House very seriously. Immediately after this session I will go and raise with the Secretary of State, his special advisers and his officials what the hon. Gentleman has said. I think that we can take from that—given all the other issues that he might have raised in his question to me this morning—that he thinks the Government are doing a very good job.

Justin Madders >

(Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)

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Can we have debate on personal responsibility? If I say or tweet something defamatory, I would expect to be responsible for the consequences of that, not the taxpayer, and I think that is what the public would expect as well. The Leader of the House's response to an earlier question suggested that, somehow, the right hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) had credit in the bank because she did not take the redundancy payment that was offered to her, or that these payments are within the rules. If that is the case, the rules are wrong, which is why we need a debate.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman has hit on it: if the rules have been followed and if we are not questioning the character of the individuals, it must be that the rules are wrong. I will raise this with the Department and the permanent secretary. However, I can reassure the House again that these matters have considerable oversight both from the monitoring officers in the Departments and from the propriety and ethics team.

Christian Wakeford >

(Bury South) (Lab)

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This week, 4 March marked the one- year anniversary of **GRO-A**'s death. **GRO-A** was a young man with a bright future and he should still be here. After speaking to his family and seeing photos of him, I can say that he was one of the kindest individuals that anyone could know and that he had a smile that would light up a room. **GRO-A** tragically took his own life following bullying while working as a trainee police officer with West Yorkshire police. Can we have a debate in Government time on police recruitment, the training of police officers and the support packages that are available? Lessons must be learned, changes must be enacted and voices must be heard.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing us to remember **GRO-A** and to get that on the record. Clearly **GRO-A** was somebody who wanted to step up to public service and serve his community. His suicide is an absolute tragedy. I know that police services in general, and in particular those responsible for training and ensuring that the right safeguarding support is there for those going through training,

has raised this today and ask that he is updated on progress to help ensure that this tragedy never happens again.

Gerald Jones >

(Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)

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I have been trying to amend the Road Traffic Act 1988 following the tragic loss of a one-year-old child, **GRO-A**, from Merthyr Tydfil. Working with **GRO-A**'s parents, I have produced an amendment that seeks to close a loophole that caused them such huge distress. In November, the Prime Minister gave a commitment at Prime Minister's questions to facilitate a meeting with the relevant Minister, possibly from Transport or Justice, for **GRO-A**'s parents. Unfortunately, despite requests, that meeting still has not taken place. Can I ask the Leader of the House to please offer her assistance in securing a debate on how we can deliver the change and, crucially, how we can facilitate a meeting with **GRO-A**'s parents?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I am sorry to hear that that meeting has not happened. I am sure that Transport Ministers would want to facilitate it, so, following this session, I will make sure that they have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said and see whether we can rectify that.

Matt Western >

(Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)

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Tomorrow is International Women's Day. It saddens me greatly that Warwickshire should have the worst conviction record for rape and serious sexual offences. Philip Seccombe, our police and crime commissioner, was one of the few to cut domestic abuse units and closed the rape and serious sexual offences unit in Warwickshire. Can we have a debate in Government time on the accountability and scrutiny of police and crime commissioners?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman raises some very serious matters. I refer him in particular to what the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's questions this week about the progress that has made on supporting victims of these heinous crimes in coming forward, and the increased conviction rate that we want to see, particularly for rape and sexual assault. I think a debate on these matters would be excellent, because there is considerable variation between areas, and in what police and crime commissioners are doing. I would welcome that scrutiny.

Alistair Strathern >

(Mid Bedfordshire) (Lab)

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On Monday, I was out in Meppershall, where residents are fed up with the condition of the main road through the village. As is the case in many villages, residents have been told that the much-needed roadworks cannot take place until developments are finished. As reasonable as that may sound, developments drag on and on, and with no end to future developments in sight, surely enough is enough. Will the relevant Minister issue a statement on whether more guidance might be needed about the length of time it is reasonable for private developments to delay clearly needed public roadworks?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

have been given a sizeable uplift in road maintenance grants, particularly for such things as potholes and resurfacing. On the 15th of this month, local authorities have to publish what they have done with that money. I encourage him to scrutinise whether that money has been spent, and spent on the right things.

Richard Foord >

(Tiverton and Honiton) (LD)

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At the end of January, the Government launched the Pharmacy First scheme, which encourages patients to consult pharmacists rather than GPs, or at least to take pressure off GPs. While that is good in theory, the reality is that the community pharmacy workforce are on their knees, with levels of trained support staff having been cut by 20%. We are seeing the closure of pharmacies in rural and coastal towns such as Axminster and Sidmouth, with a constituent telling me yesterday that queues at the pharmacy in Axminster are out the door. Will the Government please make time for a debate on recognising the value of community pharmacies?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

The Government do recognise the value of community pharmacies. There can be no Prime Minister better placed to recognise the importance of pharmacy. That is why we have not only enabled the Pharmacy First service to be stood up, but worked on it for a number of years. It is now available to all members of the public, but there were trailblazer programmes prior to that for people who were on benefits. Some 98% of pharmacies are now making use of the scheme, which also enables them to derive an income from it. That is progress to be supported and welcomed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will promote the scheme in his constituency.

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