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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Lynne Paterson, director of Tearfund Scotland.

Lynne Paterson (Tearfund Scotland): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thanks for the opportunity to address you briefly this afternoon.

As a Christian international development organisation, Tearfund sits in an interesting place between the world of international development and the world of the church. As a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee and a recipient of significant sums of Government funding, including almost £8 million from the Scottish Government, we adhere to strict codes of conduct and aim for the highest standards of accountability as we deliver aid to people of all faiths and none.

As followers of Jesus, we who work for Tearfund have a shared belief, along with the majority of the world, that people have emotional and spiritual needs as well as material ones, and that transformation involves the whole person. That is why we understand the root of poverty to be about broken relationships between ourselves and God, with each other, with our own selves and with the planet that God has given us.

We design our programmes with that in mind, seeking to bestow dignity as people understand and fulfil their God-given potential; to help communities to work together to identify and address their needs; to empower them to advocate with local governments; and to train them on how to protect the environment.

Wherever possible, we do that in partnership with local churches. That makes good development sense, because the church is right at the heart of many of the poor communities in which Tearfund works. Filled with a host of willing volunteers who are motivated by their faith in Jesus, local Christians are not just keen to help the poor; they are the poor. We work with our partners, which are often large church denominations, to help people in their own churches to understand their biblical mandate to love their neighbour in practical ways, and we equip them to deliver a whole range of development initiatives, from livelihood training

and better farming techniques to prevention of HIV and gender-based violence.

As Christians, we in Tearfund, with our thousands of supporters in Scotland and our global partners around the world, believe in the power of prayer. Development interventions will take us so far, but we believe that lasting transformation and peace in our world will require the intervention of our powerful and loving God. Our prayer is that, through our work in partnership with local churches, the needs of the whole person can be met—body, soul and spirit—and the broken relationships that we see at the heart of poverty can be healed.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Football (Sectarianism and Violence)

1. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what new measures it is considering to address sectarianism and violent behaviour associated with football. (S5T-01532)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): Our preferred solution has always been that football steps up to address this long-standing problem with meaningful solutions. It is important for football to demonstrate leadership on the issue but, if action is not taken, we firmly reserve the right to act to rid our national game of this vile cancer. I believe that the vast majority of supporters are frustrated that a small minority are bringing our game into disrepute and frustrated at the lack of action by the football authorities and clubs.

Although we would prefer football to take action, we are considering a range of options, including the role of strict liability and the licensing of football stadiums. I would welcome contributions from across the chamber on how we can work together to address the issue.

I understand that the independent review of football policing, which was commissioned by Police Scotland, will be published tomorrow, 6 March. We will, of course, carefully consider its findings.

Liam McArthur: Last week, Deputy Chief Constable Will Kerr, who served in Northern Ireland for three decades, said that he was surprised at the level of disorder and the fact that

“the consistently thuggish behaviour of a very small number of fans is considered normal.”

Days earlier, the Kilmarnock manager Steve Clarke, after quoting abuse that was thrown in his direction, asked:

“where are we living? The dark ages?”

The cabinet secretary rightly says that the vast majority of decent fans are disgusted by the actions of so-called supporters who behave in that way, but does he agree that fans are now looking to the authorities, including Parliament, to step up the efforts to combat such behaviour?

Humza Yousaf: I agree with everything that Liam McArthur has said, and I welcome the powerful remarks from DCC Will Kerr. There was also a very powerful quote from PFA Scotland's chief executive, Fraser Wishart, who said:

“The football pitch is a player's place of work and it is not unreasonable for a player, like any other employee, to be able to work with the knowledge that their workplace is indeed a safe environment, free from violence and discrimination and that their health and safety is not at risk.”

I will carefully consider Police Scotland's report when it is published tomorrow, and I will, of course, be open to suggestions from members across the chamber. However, it is for the football authorities to step up to their responsibilities—frankly, they have not done so thus far. As I have said, if they do not step up, we will consider a full range of options, including strict liability, licensing, civil football banning orders and the many other options that are on the table.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, and I certainly echo the sentiments that were expressed by Fraser Wishart.

Two years ago, Dr Duncan Morrow's report on sectarianism said that although

“football was only one part of the jigsaw of sectarianism ... The continuing reluctance of the football authorities to demonstrate serious commitment on this issue, means that strict liability must remain a real and present option.”

What is the cabinet secretary's assessment of how co-operative and constructive football clubs have been in the period since? Does he agree that there should be a cross-party approach to looking at escalating penalties including, for example, the closing of sections of grounds in more serious cases?

Humza Yousaf: Joe FitzPatrick and I met representatives from the Scottish Professional Football League and the Scottish Football Association before the worst of the behaviour that we have seen in recent weeks, and we pressed them on tackling unacceptable conduct. Although the words were warm, we are yet to see demonstrable action in that regard. I repeat what I have said in my previous two answers: we would prefer the clubs to step up but, if they do not, we reserve the right to act.

The final question that Liam McArthur asked is very valid. When we explore the full range of options, we should do so with as much consensus in the chamber as possible. As I said, a number of options are on the table, including strict liability, licensing and civil football banning orders.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have been a vocal critic of sectarianism that is associated with any football club or wider society for a number of years. He will also be aware that I am proposing a member's bill on strict liability, which could include the use of the licensing system. The cabinet secretary clearly agrees that it would be preferable for the clubs and football

authorities to bring in strict liability themselves. However, if they do not, surely a member's bill or some other mechanism would give Parliament the power to put pressure on football clubs and would be a cross-party way of working to achieve that.

Humza Yousaf: I commend James Kelly—

Members: Kelly?

Humza Yousaf: I mean James Dornan—that was a faux pas and an easy mistake to make. [*Laughter.*] Do not worry, Mr Kelly; I might come to you later.

I commend James Dornan for the work that he has done on strict liability and on the wider issue of sectarianism through the cross-party group on combatting sectarianism in Scottish society. He has been a constructive voice on that matter, and he is absolutely right. Strict liability remains on the table and we will explore the legal possibilities in that regard. We will keep a close eye on the work that James Dornan is doing.

We will also look extensively at the powers that are in our hands, such as those on licensing, which is one option. Every stadium that has a capacity of 10,000 or more spectators is required to hold a safety licence. If Parliament were minded to do so, we could look at the authorising regime for such licences. For example, in England there is the Sports Grounds Safety Authority, which is the overarching body that looks into stadium licensing. Together with the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, I am looking at whether we should create a similar body in Scotland, alongside the appropriate sanctions, such as closing down sections of grounds or whole stadiums if that is in the best interests of public safety.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Sectarianism is a blight on our national game. I associate myself with the cabinet secretary's remarks in that regard and I would be pleased to accept his offer to work closely with him on the issue. Do the measures that are being considered by the Scottish Government involve greater use of stadium bans for individuals who are engaging in such abusive behaviour? How closely are the football clubs working with the cabinet secretary on the issue?

Humza Yousaf: As I mentioned in my previous answer, Joe FitzPatrick and I have been working closely on the issue. We have met the SPFL and the SFA, and we will meet individual clubs if we receive a request to do so; between us, we have arranged a number of such meetings. I know that a minority of clubs are interested in civil football banning orders. The member will know about football banning orders, and the chief constable of Police Scotland's role in those, but some clubs

would like to have the power to apply for football banning orders. I will listen to the arguments with an open mind—I have not come to a conclusion yet.

On the member's other point, I do not doubt for a minute that we all have a shared interest in stamping out sectarianism in the game. It brings shame on us as a country and shame on the clubs that we support. Therefore, it will be important, and an imperative part of my role, that we take the entire Parliament with us on whichever option we decide on. I therefore look forward to discussions with Liam Kerr and other members across the chamber.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I caution the cabinet secretary against the attitude, which has been adopted by some commentators, that views football supporters with disdain, when only a small minority are responsible for such incidents. Does he agree that tackling bigotry and hatred needs a wider and more considered discussion, and that it should not be viewed solely through the lens of a football match? I agree that football clubs and authorities must do more, but does the cabinet secretary accept that any football-specific initiatives need consensus and widespread support, and that rushed, knee-jerk reactions are not the answer?

Humza Yousaf: I will say a few things to James Kelly. The first is that we will continue to do what we have been doing to tackle the wider sectarianism in society, but let us not have our heads in the sand and ignore what has been happening in football, not only in recent weeks. I know that James Kelly is a football supporter—in fact he and I support the same club—so he knows that it has been going on not just for years but for decades. I would have thought that, as the poster boy for the repeal of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, Mr Kelly might have come to the chamber today with a little bit of humility, given that a number of stakeholders told us that repealing the act would embolden the unacceptable conduct that we have heard about today.

Mr Kelly is right that we do not need just words—we need action. I note that, when the act was repealed, he said that he would bring forward a plan "fit for 2018". We have not yet seen that plan, but if Mr Kelly and other have constructive ideas, I ask them to bring them to the chamber. There is a society-wide issue, but let us not ignore the fact that there is a problem with sectarianism and unacceptable conduct in and around football that we must tackle, as well as the wider issue.

Paramedics (Mental Health)

2. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the number of paramedics signed off work with depression or stress increased by more than 40 per cent last year. (S5T-01528)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): We value the tremendous work that Scottish Ambulance Service staff do, often in exceptionally challenging conditions. Employee health and wellbeing are fundamental, which is why we have made clear that the Scottish Ambulance Service must have robust policies in place to support mental health and wellbeing. The board has provided assurances that a number of programmes that provide dedicated stress incident management and effective trauma support are already under way across the service.

Scottish Ambulance Service funding has increased to a record high and paramedic staffing has increased by 19 per cent. We are committed to ensuring that the service has the resources that it needs to support staff and promote employee welfare.

Alexander Stewart: In 2018, 151 paramedics took time off for anxiety, stress or depression, which was a rise of 42.5 per cent on the previous year. Does the minister agree that the statistics are shocking?

Joe FitzPatrick: I agree that the welfare of our staff is fundamental, which is why we have been clear that the Ambulance Service must have robust policies in place to manage employee health and wellbeing. We will continue to work with the service to support the delivery of effective health and wellbeing initiatives, including training, counselling and peer support. One example of that is the Anchor centre in Glasgow, which my colleague the Minister for Mental Health visited just last week.

Alexander Stewart: Staff in the Ambulance Service have suggested that there is a reluctance by their employer to accept that staff suffer from post-traumatic stress. Staff have reported that there is not much support available to them. Will the minister commit to doing all that he can, as a matter of urgency, to help the Ambulance Service to educate its staff and furnish them with the necessary skills to cope with post-traumatic stress?

Joe FitzPatrick: I have just talked about the policies that we expect to be in place. Another point that I should make is that the figures that were released in December 2018, which relate to Alexander Stewart's question, are based on self-

reporting by staff, so the idea that it has something to do with management is not right.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

The minister might be aware that I raised the issue of sickness levels in the Ambulance Service at the Health and Sport Committee last week. The Ambulance Service has the third highest level of sickness absence in all of Scotland's health boards, and the levels have remained static year on year. Is the minister confident that the current approach of the Ambulance Service leadership is sufficient to support the workforce and reverse the trend?

Joe FitzPatrick: It is important that we keep ensuring that the Ambulance Service—as well as every other part of our health service—provides the appropriate support to its staff. We must provide staff with the correct resources, which is why we have increased funding substantially to the service. The number of paramedics has increased by 19 per cent, and we are committed to training 1,000 more paramedics over the course of this parliamentary session. It is important that we have the correct resources and structure in place to support those staff.

European Union Withdrawal Negotiations

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-16107, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on European Union withdrawal negotiations.

14:17

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In Cardiff this afternoon, Jeremy Miles, the Welsh Brexit minister, will open a debate on a motion that is, in essence, the same as the one that we debate here this afternoon. The Welsh First Minister will close the debate in the National Assembly for Wales.

It is worth emphasising that this is the first occasion in 20 years of devolution when the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have acted in unison in this way. We have been brought together by our dismay—which borders now on despair—at the United Kingdom Government's approach to and handling of Brexit. That despair is echoed across our countries.

As recently as last summer, the Prime Minister confidently told me that, by autumn 2018, we would know not only the terms of exit, but significant detail about the UK's future relationship with the European Union; yet here we are, just 24 days until the UK is due to leave the EU, and still we do not know whether there will be any agreed terms of exit or a transition phase, and the terms of the future relationship are not much more than a blank sheet of paper. The potential consequences of that for businesses, communities, individuals and public services the length and breadth of the UK grow more stark by the day.

In the face of the chaos, the Prime Minister is showing no decisive leadership. Instead of doing the right thing and ruling out a no-deal exit at any stage, she insists on freewheeling the car ever closer to the Brexit cliff edge. She is trying to run down the clock, making undeliverable promises on an almost daily basis to hardline Brexiteers and, more recently, offering tawdry, half-baked bribes to Labour members of Parliament. Perhaps her one and only note of consistency in all of this, over the past two and a half years, has been her contempt for Scotland and the position of the Scottish Parliament. Seemingly, Scotland is not even worthy of her bribes—although we should probably take that as a compliment.

The domestic and international standing of the Westminster system of government has surely never been lower in any of our lifetimes. This fiasco should not be allowed to continue for even one day more. That is why the Scottish and Welsh

Parliaments are today making three demands of the UK Government.

First, the prospect of leaving the EU with no deal must be ruled out—and ruled out not just at the end of March but at any time. Secondly, MPs must not allow themselves to be bullied into choosing between the catastrophe of no deal and the disaster of the UK Government's deal. Thirdly, an extension of article 50 is essential and now urgent, and must be requested now.

The demand to rule out a no-deal scenario is, I hope, supported right across this chamber. Let me be very clear about this point, as Michael Russell has been in recent weeks: right now the Scottish Government is doing everything that it possibly can do to plan for and mitigate the impact of a no-deal Brexit. I am personally chairing our weekly resilience meetings, to look at medicine and food supplies, economic and community impacts and transport links.

Every aspect of that planning reinforces the overwhelming reality: that no rational Government, acting responsibly and in the interests of those it serves, would countenance leaving the European Union without a deal. The UK Government's own forecasts predict that a no-deal scenario could reduce GDP by 9 per cent over a 15-year period.

That is bad enough, but we need only look at the nature of the preparations that are under way to know that the impact would be much more immediate: the UK Government has been buying fridges to stockpile medicine; it has been testing motorways and airfields in Kent for use as lorry parks; and it has been awarding, and then cancelling, ferry contracts with businesses that do not even own ships. It has been taking steps that should be utterly inconceivable in a prosperous, developed economy in conditions of peacetime—all of it to plan for an avoidable outcome, which, if it happens, will happen by the choice of the UK Government. It is unforgivably reckless.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I do not want a no-deal Brexit either. Will the First Minister heed the calls of Scottish business, NFU Scotland, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Scotch Whisky Association and many others in the business community here in Scotland and back the Prime Minister's deal, so that we can avoid a no-deal Brexit?

The First Minister: The member mischaracterises many of those whom he quotes. I said at the outset that I would come on to this point and I will do so: I do not think that it is acceptable—and it is utterly incredible that the Scottish Tories suggest that it is—that our country should be in the position of having to choose between catastrophe and disaster. A direct answer

to the question is, no—we will not choose disaster in order to avert catastrophe.

The approach of the UK Government is unforgivably reckless. No deal should be ruled out definitively—not just at the end of March, but period. Today, from Edinburgh and Cardiff, we demand that it is.

However—and this brings me to Adam Tomkins's point and to the second purpose of today's motion—the UK Government must not use the threat of no deal to blackmail the UK Parliament into voting for its current bad deal, and in that it must not be aided and abetted by the Scottish Tories.

The response to the rejection of the Prime Minister's deal so far has been characterised by delays, denials, dissembling and, most recently, desperate attempts at bribery. Ministers have wasted months pretending that significant changes to the Northern Ireland backstop are possible, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Surely, it would be much better to face up to the fact that the Prime Minister's deal is unpopular because it is a thoroughly bad deal—a bad deal for the whole of the UK and, certainly, a bad deal for Scotland.

For the benefit of the Scottish Tories, I will spell out why it is a bad deal. It would take us out of the European Union, against our democratic wishes, and out of the single market and the customs union, against all our economic interests; and it provides no clarity whatsoever on what our long-term future relationship with the EU will look like. In effect, the UK Parliament is being asked to approve a blindfold Brexit, which is completely and utterly unacceptable. [*Interruption.*] Adam Tomkins is saying that we have a document that is 500-odd pages long, but that is the withdrawal agreement; the political declaration, which is what is meant to set out the future relationship, is five or seven pages long. To the extent that any direction of travel can be discerned from those few pages, the declaration points to a long-term social and economic disaster for Scotland. The red lines that the Prime Minister has drawn mean that we are heading towards a Canada-style deal at best.

I want to focus on what that means. The Scottish Government estimates that it could lead to a fall in national income of £1,600 per person by 2030 compared with EU membership. Our services sector, which makes up three quarters of our total economy, will be particularly badly hit. Being taken out of the customs union and pursuing an independent trade policy will also make the UK vulnerable to the trade priorities of Donald Trump. When the United States Government's negotiating priorities were published at the end of last week, it was absolutely no surprise to hear about fears that Scottish and UK

markets could be opened to chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-fed beef.

Of course, in addition, part and parcel of the approach that is taken in the Prime Minister's deal is the ending of freedom of movement. Combined with the Tories' despicable hostile environment policy, that could lead to a fall in the number of people working in Scotland and paying tax here. The national health service and social care will pay a particularly heavy price if EU nationals are deterred from working here.

In short, the deal that is on the table—the disaster that the Scottish Tories think we should accept to avert catastrophe—guarantees us more years of uncertainty, during which Scotland's interests would be at the mercy of a vicious and seemingly never-ending Tory civil war on Europe, in which currently—I am afraid to say—the extreme Brexiteers appear to be in the ascendancy. It could open up our markets to US products that, for very good reasons, are currently banned and it would damage our economy, our living standards and our NHS.

For all those reasons and many, many more, the Prime Minister's deal would be disastrous and it must be rejected by the House of Commons.

What should happen instead? There is an onus on those of us who think that the Prime Minister's deal and a no-deal Brexit should be rejected to say what should happen instead. The Scottish Government has made it clear that we see continued EU membership as the best outcome for Scotland and the UK. If that cannot be secured for the UK as a whole, we believe that that option should be open to Scotland as an independent country.

Of course, for more than two years, we have put forward compromise proposals that would mean that the UK as a whole would stay in the customs union and the single market. The Welsh Government has also put forward plans for a closer relationship with the EU. Shamefully, the UK Government has ignored us at all stages of the process.

What the Welsh and Scottish Governments are proposing—this is the third point that is raised in today's motion—is that there must now be an extension of article 50. Nobody—not even the Scottish Conservatives, I am sure—now believes that Brexit can be delivered on 29 March. Quite apart from anything else, there is no time left to properly scrutinise and pass the legislation required. However, we should not simply seek a short extension, as the Prime Minister seems to envisage; we need an extension that is long enough to enable a better path to be taken. Of course, that could again open the way to the

possibility of a single market and customs union compromise.

The preferable alternative option is a second EU referendum, and there is a strong democratic case for that. After all, those voting to leave the EU did not know precisely what they were voting for; the leave campaign was deliberately vague—some may say deceitful—about the form that Brexit would take. Where the leave side was specific, it was less than honest—for example, about the prospect of Turkey joining the EU and the NHS getting more money. We also now know that the leave campaign broke the law when it came to spending.

I understand that the prospect of a second vote does not appeal to everyone; and we cannot, and should not, take for granted that there would be a majority for remain across the UK—that would have to be worked for. However, simply pressing ahead with Brexit, knowing that we are heading for disaster, makes no sense at all. After all, whatever most people voted for, it certainly is not where we find ourselves now.

A second referendum provides everyone with a second opportunity. Although Scotland, of course, has the option of independence, for the UK as a whole another referendum is now the best option available.

Last month, I opened the new Scottish Government hub in Paris. In a city such as that, with evidence of Scotland's ties with Europe extending back more than seven centuries, it is impossible not to feel a deep and profound sense of loss about what Brexit means for Scotland. Our country has benefited immeasurably from the hundreds of thousands of EU citizens who have made this country their home. Many Scots have had their horizons widened and their lives enriched by the ability to study, travel and work in Europe. The EU, although far from perfect—we would all agree on that—has also encouraged stronger trading ties, a cleaner environment and better conditions for workers. Perhaps most of all, it has exemplified the benefits that we all gain when independent countries co-operate for the greater good. We should not choose to give that up lightly.

For more than two years now, since the result of the EU referendum, the Scottish Government has proposed ways to mitigate the damage that Brexit will cause. We have been joined in our efforts by the Welsh Government. Shamefully, we have been ignored by the UK Government at almost every turn.

This motion is a further attempt to propose a way forward. It provides the basis—even at this late hour—for a more sensible and less damaging approach and, by doing so, allows us to act in the

interests not just of our constituents but of the UK as a whole and, indeed, of Europe as a whole.

I commend the motion to Parliament and I hope that members of this Scottish Parliament, together with our friends in the Welsh Assembly, will vote for it this evening.

I move,

That the Parliament reiterates its opposition to the damaging EU exit deal agreed by the UK Government; agrees that a no deal outcome to the current negotiations on EU withdrawal would be completely unacceptable on 29 March 2019 or at any time; calls on the UK Government to take immediate steps to prevent the UK leaving the EU without a deal, and agrees that the Article 50 process should be extended so that agreement can be reached on the best way forward to protect the interests of Scotland, Wales and the UK as a whole.

14:33

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives will be opposing the First Minister's motion, but I thank her for at least bringing this debate to Parliament. It is almost three years since all the Holyrood party leaders stood here to argue for a remain vote and there is little doubt that the decisions made in the next few weeks will be among the most critical that our country has had to face in recent times. Therefore, this is a timely opportunity to debate, at this key juncture, our withdrawal from the European Union, which the UK has voted to leave after 40 years.

I believe that the right decision at Westminster is to support the withdrawal agreement, to leave the EU on 29 March, and to move to the next phase of our negotiations with the EU.

The Brexit referendum in June 2016 was one of the largest exercises in democracy that this country has ever witnessed. The number of people who voted to leave was the largest number of people to vote for anything in our history. Although they have been largely forgotten in this place, let us not forget that they included 1 million people in Scotland—more than the number who voted for the Scottish National Party in the most recent Westminster election.

That was without the same effort underpinning the leave campaign here as was the case elsewhere in the UK. In Scotland, the campaign was led by former Labour MP Tom Harris and was opposed by all the Scottish party leaders, all our MPs and all but a handful of MSPs, but it nonetheless attracted more than 1 million Scottish supporters and a 38 per cent vote to leave. That is a reality upon which this Parliament has never properly reflected. Too often, those 1 million Scots have been casually dismissed as either deluded or deranged or both—or worse—and their anger is very real.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: In a little while.

The vote did not carry any caveats. It was a UK-wide referendum that meant that we were all going to go or we were all going to stay. Indeed, that was recognised by the First Minister during the campaign, when she took part in UK-wide television debates, rightly in my view, as we both campaigned to convince people from across the UK to remain. As I have said previously—I was quoted by no less a source than the then First Minister—had I lost the independence referendum in 2014, I would have been among the first to join team Scotland in seeking a good deal for us outside the UK. That would have been my duty. Likewise, after the Brexit vote, it is vital that the losers, however hard it is, provide their consent to the result and seek to make our withdrawal work.

I now hear an argument from the SNP and others that the 2016 vote is invalid, because leave voters somehow did not realise what they were voting for in the referendum. We are asked to accept the assertion, with only self-serving anecdotal evidence to credit it, that 17 million people were so foolish when they voted to leave that they had obviously been hoodwinked. Such an argument only illustrates in the eyes of those who voted to leave the arrogance of those who make it and the very elitism that those voters in part voted against. Almost every study of the 2016 vote has shown that leave voters knew exactly what they were voting for—it was to remove the UK from EU supranational institutions and to get greater control of their community and our borders.

I want to set out why the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration that goes with it are worthy of our support. As time passes, and as the pressure of a deadline intensifies, it is all too easy to lose track of how far we have come. If we cast our minds back to mid-2016, we find that, at that point, the discussion was often nervously considering the possibilities of no deal being reached with our European partners, a complete breakdown in talks with the EU, mutual intransigence, the EU27 rejecting the deal and a no-deal outcome becoming a certainty. We were told that we would never be able to agree financial terms to leave and that the price that the EU would demand would be between £80 billion and £100 billion. We repeatedly heard that view expressed to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee. Even a year or 18 months ago, a deal was far from inevitable, but we now have it in our grasp.

The agreement offers us a chance to deliver Brexit in a smooth and workable manner, and that is the view of our 27 EU partners every bit as

much as it is the view of the UK Government. It is now the only way that we can leave the EU on the basis of an organised exit. It delivers on the decision that the country made, handing back control of our money, laws and borders to the British people. It returns control over our waters, offering us the chance to revitalise our fishing sector. Although we will be able to strike new deals around the world, the agreement will also ensure that we maintain a strong and abiding friendship with our allies across the continent.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): If the deal is such a roaring success, why was it rejected by such a massive vote in the House of Commons?

Jackson Carlaw: It was rejected by such a massive vote in the House of Commons for a variety of reasons—not least, that the deal as it was presented then was not acceptable. That is why, since that day, work has progressed to achieve a different outcome, and we will see what that is next week.

I again state unequivocally, because I believe that this is fundamentally important, particularly today, that Scotland does not value those who have made their homes here only for the economic benefit that that brings, important as it is. Those who have settled here contribute immeasurably to the fabric and culture of our country and our whole national life experience. No one could have come away from watching the interview with Mrs Macdonald that was broadcast earlier today without feeling deeply saddened by it. It is a reminder to us all that major events such as Brexit are not really about graphs or charts; they are about the impact on people. I am sorry for any distress that that has caused her, and I hope very much that she will get support over the coming weeks.

If we are a more tolerant and inclusive nation, it is because of the presence of new Scots, not in spite of it. In a UK with a rapidly changing demographic, we all need to work together to ensure that that is the perspective of the whole of the UK and not just of the politicians in this chamber. We do not envisage a United Kingdom that pulls up the drawbridge on the world; we want it to remain the same outward-looking country that it has always been.

Indeed, the Prime Minister's deal secures many of the asks that the SNP once demanded. It asked for an implementation period to smooth our exit from the EU—that is being delivered. Rightly, it called for guarantees for EU citizens who live here—those, too, are being delivered. It has insisted on the need to prevent a hard border in Ireland—again, that is exactly what the deal will ensure. At no stage has the SNP acknowledged any of that. It has a campaign to run: to use Brexit to stir the independence pot. In its own words, that

“transcends everything”. It is also the core reason that the SNP has lost—not gained—support since the Brexit referendum took place. Rightly, it has been seen to be using Brexit for its own political ends. Let us remember that at the election in 2017, the SNP, led by Nicola Sturgeon, lost half a million votes—the largest loss of votes in a single election by any party in modern Scottish political history.

Just 25 days are left before we leave the EU. No amount of talking, debating or arguing will get around the cold, immovable fact that if no deal is agreed, we will leave with no deal. That is not a political statement or an opinion; it is a fact. It is the automatic operation of the law and the default position, and no amount of bluster will get away from it. The EU has made it clear that any request to extend the deadline, were one to be made, would be agreed only to facilitate an agreement that has been reached, not to allow further vacillation. It is not enough for the SNP—or any other party—simply to say that it wants to avoid no deal. If it wants to do so, it will have to back a deal. Only one deal is on the table—one that, until the final vote, is still capable of clarification to meet the genuine concerns that many MPs and others still have. Even as we speak, progress continues to be made to resolve such concerns, and to give a majority of MPs the reassurance that they need so that they are able, in good conscience, to give the deal their support.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): If Jackson Carlaw has such faith that changes can be made to matters such as the backstop in order to bring a majority of MPs on board, surely he must also have faith that the British people will have the necessary judgment to make the final decision on the deal.

Jackson Carlaw: I say to Mr Cole-Hamilton that I voted no in the independence referendum, and I voted remain in the EU referendum. I very much hope that I will never have to vote in another referendum in my lifetime, and I intend to ensure that I do not.

The SNP Government motion that is before us today argues that MPs should oppose the Prime Minister’s deal and instead demand an extension to article 50. Of course, that option is now available to them. However, I strongly urge MPs not to go down that route. Crucially, a decision to delay will not solve any of the issues that we face today. After any extension, the choice will still be no deal, this deal or one close to it. Indeed, for us in the UK, it may only make matters worse by extending—for weeks, possibly months or even years—the damaging uncertainty that firms face. As Alex Neil said:

“Brexit will happen whether we like it or not. The democratic wishes of the people have to be respected. To

do otherwise would be to risk a huge backlash and undermine the principles of our democracy.”

I can see why a nationalist party, which wants to create and exploit such divisions and perpetuate chaos and uncertainty, might see the upsides to that outcome. It is a nationalist party that argues that leaving a 40-year-old union is bad but that leaving a 300-year-old union—which is many times more important economically, culturally and in many other ways—is good.

I urge other parties of reason to hear this. Delaying a decision on Brexit is not a solution; it is simply a way to prolong the indecision and, by doing so, to keep open for longer the divisions that the country faces and to allow even deeper ones to be exploited all over again by the SNP. I back a deal, and I back Brexit being delivered. Ahead of us lie challenges and opportunities. In Scotland we need a Government that does not look backwards, bitter and riddled with grievance, but focuses on creating a dynamic, entrepreneurial country that succeeds in the new international environment. The SNP Government is no longer acting in good faith for the people of Scotland, who need fresh, clean leadership. In just two years, we will have the chance to elect a Government that will give them just that.

I move amendment S5M-16107.1, to leave out from “reiterates” to end and insert:

“respects the results of constitutional referendums; supports leaving the EU with a deal; notes that a no deal outcome will happen by the automatic operation of the law unless an agreement is reached; further notes that this would still be the case after an extension to Article 50, and believes that the Scottish Government is no longer acting in good faith for the people of Scotland.”

14:44

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I open for Scottish Labour in support of the motion in the name of the First Minister in this Parliament and in unity with the Labour First Minister in the National Assembly for Wales. Today, we will demonstrate that the clear majority in the Parliament opposes Theresa May’s damaging European Union exit deal and that the clear majority in the Parliament wishes to end once and for all the no-deal Brexit option.

Let us be clear that Theresa May’s Brexit deal is not in our grasp—it is dead; it was rejected by MPs on an unprecedented scale. I say to the Scottish Tories that the motion—this political action—is absolutely necessary not despite the political crisis that Theresa May has brought us to but precisely because of it.

The reality is that a new approach is needed, as Labour has said for months and months. Instead of the Tory race to the bottom, we need not a deal that is bad for the people of Scotland, bad for the

people of the UK and bad for the people of Wales, as the proposed one is, but a deal that protects jobs, best defends workers' rights, safeguards environmental standards and consumer interests and is underpinned by a permanent customs union so that—critically—it prevents a hard border in Ireland.

Labour's proposals are the basis for reuniting the country. They form the building blocks of a realistic alternative, which the European Council President, Donald Tusk, has said offers a "promising way out". That alternative would also win support among trade unions and businesses and would win the people's consent, too. That alternative could break the deadlock and prevent us from catastrophically crashing out of Europe without a deal.

By contrast, Theresa May has been playing fast and loose with people's livelihoods, having played fast and loose with people's citizenship rights. She is trying to run down the clock so that the only options appear to be her bad deal and no deal. Neither of those is acceptable; both would damage our economy and our social fabric, and we will do everything in our power in this Parliament, working with the National Assembly for Wales, to prevent them. That is why Labour fully agrees with the clause in the motion that says that

"a no deal outcome to the current negotiations on EU withdrawal would be completely unacceptable",

not just

"on 29 March 2019"

but

"at any time".

Before I was elected to the Parliament, I spent 20 years as a trade union organiser. One of the enduring trade union principles that guided me then and guides me now is that we should not go back to the membership with a deal that it has already voted on. If someone does that, the membership will say in no uncertain terms, "We've already told you the answer."

In the talk last summer of a second referendum, it looked as if we were being urged to do that—to ask people to vote once more on exactly the same proposition as they voted on in 2016. However, we have now reached a different place; we are coming towards the end of the parliamentary road, and we hope that there is still an opportunity to fundamentally revise the Brexit deal. To be frank, we hope that the Conservative Government falls and that there is a general election. However, if we cannot secure that, there will be no alternative but to go to the people in a public vote with a credible leave option, as well as the remain option, on the ballot paper.

We must accept that none of those routes will be straightforward. However, it is now inevitable, given the Prime Minister's intransigence and incompetence, that the UK Government will have to seek an extension to the article 50 process in order to extend talks with the European Union. Therefore, the motion is right in calling

"on the UK Government to take immediate steps to prevent the UK leaving the EU without a deal".

Nonetheless—and I speak as somebody who voted to remain—it is a matter of fact that more than a million people voted to leave in Scotland. To people living in Fraserburgh who voted leave, it will seem odd to hear politicians in Edinburgh telling them that we all voted remain. Although there can be no respect for the Tories' shambolic handling of Brexit, it is important to respect how people voted in the referendum. It is important in a democracy to respect the ballot box—

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Will Richard Leonard clearly indicate whether he supports his UK leader when he says that he is now in favour of a people's vote?

Richard Leonard: The answer is yes, I am in favour of a people's vote. I am also saying that if there is still an opportunity for a general election, we should take it, and that if there is still an opportunity to revise the deal next week, we should take that, too.

It is important to recognise where the real division in society lies. It is not between the people in Aberdeen who voted to remain and those in Abergavenny who voted to leave, and it is not between working-class families in Scotland and working-class families in London or Wales. Those are false divisions, propagated by those whose sole purpose is to divide communities and to wield power for its own sake. Our purpose is not to divide people; it is to bring people together on the basis that Scotland's economy can no longer be just left to the market. We need a more radical approach that extends democracy into our workplaces and communities, to bring about real change and give people hope by tackling inequality, giving people dignity in retirement, ending the attacks that deliberately hit the poorest the hardest, building the homes that we need, investing in our industries, investing in our public services and investing in our people again.

We have to find a way forward that brings all our communities together, however they voted in the EU referendum and whatever their views are now. If we do not do that, we risk division and instability for years to come. We have to strive for popular consent. We have to unite and not divide. That is the decisive battle that we face. It is a battle that we must wage in the name of democracy, according to the principles of consent, not only

inside our Parliaments and Assemblies but out there in our communities.

14:52

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Once upon a time, not so very long ago, we might have thought that the implausible claims of the Brexiteers just sounded like nonsense being spouted by desperate campaigners who did not think that they had a hope of winning, and who were making promises to which they were confident that they would never be held.

When Liam Fox said,

“Well, believe me, we’ll have up to 40”

trade deals

“ready for one second after midnight in March 2019”,

we might have thought that that was just laughable. Now it is contemptible.

When David Davies said that

“Within minutes of a vote for #Brexit CEO’s would be knocking down Chancellor Merkel’s door ... Demanding access to the British market”,

or when Dan Hannan said that

“Absolutely nobody is threatening our place in the Single Market”,

we might have thought that some people were threatening our place in the single market, but it is clear now that those who were arguing for leaving the European Union, while being keen at the time to emphasise the benefits of a soft Brexit and maintaining a close connection with the single market, were secretly planning the very opposite.

Then we saw the result. The result was on a knife edge across the UK as a whole, and two of the four nations voted to remain. We might have thought that, when we saw that result—a 52 per cent to 48 per cent vote for leave—that must mean that there would be compromise and reaching out across the dividing lines in order to achieve a soft Brexit.

We might have thought, as Ruth Davidson did, that maintaining our position in the single market and maintaining freedom of movement was the right course to take. If that course had been taken, I suspect that the most committed remainers among us would probably have had to accept that compromise.

However, in all the time since the process commenced, Theresa May has repeatedly refused to face down her extremist wing. We might have thought that the Prime Minister must eventually decide which wing of her party she is on—she cannot keep on pretending to be on both. However, month after month, she has continued to put her efforts to ensure party unity ahead of the

national interest, and is apparently deluding herself that everyone from Jacob Rees-Mogg to Dominic Grieve can be held to the same policy.

Then we heard “Brexit means Brexit.” It was a funny line the first time it was used, although we might have been thinking, “She can’t be serious! That can’t really be all she’s got.” However, nearly three years on, all that we have seen is a display of incompetence on an historic scale. As the days tick down to the self-imposed deadline, still no one in this country knows what our fundamental relationship will be with our nearest neighbours in just a few weeks. “Brexit means Brexit” is still all they have.

The leaders of the two main UK parties deny that they are just letting the clock run down, but time after time they have delayed the decisions that we all know must be taken. This chaos must be stopped. I welcome the fact that Jeremy Corbyn and Richard Leonard, as we have heard, are now backing a people’s vote, because the choices are simple: the withdrawal agreement, the cliff edge, or seeking of the people’s consent to stop this mess and stay in the European Union.

The withdrawal agreement has already been rejected, and it is increasingly clear that the changes that the Brexit ultras want to see—to abandon the people of the island of Ireland—will not happen. The Prime Minister cannot get through this with only the support of Conservatives, the European research group and the Democratic Unionist Party. It is also clear that a meagre bung to Labour MPs in leave-voting seats will only alienate opposition even more strongly.

The no-deal cliff edge also cannot be tolerated. Today, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will say so clearly, and we know that a majority of Westminster MPs will say so, as well. The UK Government must abandon its strategy of threatening every part of the UK with that self-destructive path.

We must now choose between delaying or revoking article 50. Many people rightly ask what use a delay would be unless it would open a fundamentally new path. The answer is obvious: a delay would enable us to have a people’s vote to allow the public to cancel this crisis. I am sorry, but I do not think that Jackson Carlaw’s discomfort at the prospect of fighting another referendum campaign amounts to any kind of principled reason to say that democracy ended in June 2016.

In closing, I want to say that I have heard many people say that if a people’s vote takes place and Brexit is cancelled, there will be those who feel betrayed and that that will hand an opportunity to the far right to seek a culture of betrayal and grievance. There is that danger, but that same danger will exist if Brexit is completed, because

those far-right forces, which have been so consciously cultivated and unleashed by the leave campaign, will still be there if Brexit is completed, and they will use a sense of triumphalism just as much as they would use a sense of betrayal. That threat exists in our society now. Those who have campaigned for leave are culpable in the creation of that threat. We will have to face it down, whatever happens with Brexit.

In the meantime, we should all unite in supporting today's motion, so that the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly can speak with a clear voice and say extend or revoke. Give the choice back to the people.

14:59

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The Liberal Democrats support the motion. It is obvious that we must avoid a no-deal Brexit. Business has spoken out, cabinet ministers have spoken out, and even some Brexiteers use no deal as a threat to get a supposedly better deal from the EU, but there being no deal is still a real possibility. It is therefore helpful that the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament are speaking out together against that deeply damaging option.

However, that is not enough—we need a route out of this. Now that the Labour Party and Richard Leonard are on side, we need to unite on a people's vote, too. There is an opportunity for all leaders to stand together at the people's vote march in London on 23 March. Vince Cable will be there, and I hope that Nicola Sturgeon will be there. There will be no better opportunity than that march for Jeremy Corbyn to stand up and make absolutely clear his support for a people's vote.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Mr Rennie clarify exactly what the question would be if there were to be another people's vote?

Willie Rennie: It is clear that the choice needs to be the deal that is agreed in the UK Parliament versus remaining in the European Union. I make it absolutely clear that I want to remain in the European Union, because any other option will damage our economy and our way of life.

It has been suggested that everyone knew what Brexit would mean, back in 2016. However, the people who ran the leave campaign still cannot agree on what Brexit means. Jacob Rees-Mogg disagrees with Liam Fox, who disagrees with Boris Johnson, who disagrees with Michael Gove. If the people who were in charge of the leave campaign cannot agree on what Brexit means today, how on earth was everyone supposed to know what it meant back in 2016, three years ago? That is a good reason to let the British people have the final say on Brexit.

The UK Parliament as a whole cannot agree on a way forward. If that is the case, the only option is to hand the decision back to the people. That is another good reason to give the British people the final say.

I respect those who sincerely voted to leave, which is why I do not want to re-run the referendum by posing the same question. My plea is simple: if there are people who are in favour of Theresa May's deal—or any deal, for that matter—and who believe in the deal and have confidence that it is the will of the British people, I ask them to put the question back to the people. If the deal is so good, they will have nothing to fear. It is one of the biggest decisions that this country has ever faced, so it is wrong to deprive the people of the final say. That is another good reason to give the British people the final say.

People are fed up with the debate and want an end to it. I, too, am fed up with the debate and want an end to it. However, what Theresa May will not tell people is that it will not end any time soon. I do not want to depress members in the chamber, but I have to say that if, somehow, Theresa May cobbles together a majority in Parliament for the withdrawal agreement, it will mark only the end of the beginning. It will not be over on 29 March; we will have the transition phase and then the endless negotiation over the free trade agreement with the EU. We will replay the arguments over and over again.

The EU-Canada comprehensive economic and trade agreement was discussed for 22 years and negotiated for seven years. The transatlantic trade and investment partnership between the EU and the United States was talked about back in the 1990s, but has not been agreed yet and is nowhere near being implemented. The whole reason for the backstop is that everyone knows that the transition period is an inadequate time in which to negotiate a comprehensive free trade agreement. The agony will go on and on and on.

The best way to bring this pain to an end is to put the decision back to the British people and let them decide whether they want more of this pain, division and anger, or want to stop them now.

All Brexit options will damage our economy, compared with what we have now. That is what the UK Government's analysis admits: the UK will be poorer economically under any form of Brexit than it would through staying in the EU. According to official figures, the UK economy could be up to 3.9 per cent smaller after 15 years under Theresa May's Brexit plan, compared with staying in the EU. A no-deal Brexit is even worse and could mean a 9.3 per cent hit. That is another good reason to give the British people the final say.

Let me give one more reason to back a people's vote. For me, this is the most important reason. I respect those who voted to leave the European Union. They tell me that they want our country to be stronger, and they believe that they can achieve that by standing alone: they believe that Europe is holding us back. I politely tell them that this country has never stood alone. It is why we are leading members of NATO and the United Nations. It is why we have the second-biggest international aid budget in the world, one of the best armed forces in the world and one of the best diplomatic services in the world. We play our part, and we do so by working together with others.

Our country stands for something good, and we do good things with the European Union. Do not let anybody tell us otherwise. Our economy is bigger than the basket case it was in the 1970s because we trade freely with one another. We are safer because we share intelligence and security with one another. We carry even more influence in the world because we stand together with one another.

We are a country that people respect. That is not because we are on our own but because we work together. For the sake of our country, we must work together for the greater good. We must never walk away.

15:06

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to contribute to this historic debate, in which Scotland and Wales are speaking simultaneously and in solidarity in order to stop the madness of a no-deal Brexit. We are hurtling towards the precipice of having no deal, which only last week the UK Government said would inflict greater damage on both Scotland and Wales than it would on the UK as a whole—although goodness knows that that would be damaging enough.

Scotland's economy would suffer 8 per cent shrinkage, according to the UK Government, with a matching loss to that of Wales of 8.1 per cent. The UK economy as a whole faces a 6.3 per cent reduction, which is accompanied by stark warnings of disruption to cross-channel trade that would lead to delays in food supplies, a third of which come from the EU.

We have reached a pretty pass when, here in Scotland, the Scottish Government's chief economic advisor, Professor Gary Gillespie, predicts a slightly less disastrous projected gross domestic product fall of 7 per cent. Professor Gillespie's paper is a detailed piece of work that extrapolates the effects of various Brexit scenarios—all of them in varying shades of gloomy grey—and drills down into the effects on

sectors and regions of our country. The paper sets out two potential no-deal scenarios. The impacts of both would mean that Scotland's trade with the EU would be significantly impaired, with a potential drop in exports of between 10 per cent and 20 per cent. He also predicts heightened uncertainty, which could reduce business investment in Scotland by £1 billion in this year alone.

International net migration into Scotland, which is currently at 13,000 a year, will fall. Indeed, it could turn negative, given the predicted 30 per cent fall in the value of sterling and the hostile environment that is sending such a chilling message to EU citizens. Those things mean that many workers are likely to leave for both financial and personal reasons.

Professor Gillespie says that the economic slowdown that would result from those multiple whammies would result in unemployment rising by 100,000—100,000 more Scots would be out of work. That is why we need to put the brakes on Brexit.

The Conservatives tell us that that can be avoided by backing the Prime Minister, but that does not hold much water, given that the Prime Minister just a few weeks ago voted against her own deal when she backed the Brady amendment to ditch the Irish backstop. Anyone who speaks to anyone in Brussels knows that the Irish backstop and the withdrawal agreement are indivisible. I realise that the anti-Europe faction in Mrs May's party, which she uses up so much of her time and energy appeasing, probably does not speak to Brussels, but she does, so she must know that the EU will not ditch Dublin. It is a difficult lesson for those in her party who still cling to a post-colonial delusion about British imperial power and influence, but it is Ireland that has held all the cards in this negotiation. There must be a lesson there for Scotland and—who knows?—perhaps for Wales, too.

I support the motion's reiteration of Parliament's opposition to a no-deal Brexit, and I support the motion's contention that we must not and cannot support the EU withdrawal agreement for which Mrs May has tried, and failed, to win parliamentary support.

In a previous speech on the subject, I said that the deal would only continue the uncertainty that has plagued our country since 2016. At the end of any so-called implementation period, we could still be staring over a cliff edge.

I will use just one example of that uncertainty around our future deal. Services are not mentioned at all in the withdrawal agreement, but the UK enjoys a huge surplus of services with Europe. Sir Ivan Rogers, the UK's former

ambassador to the EU, said in January that when we get into talks

“we will discover, at a granular level, just how bad it is to start from a tabula rasa third country baseline on services. And we shall then spend a lot of negotiating capital ... to try and lever up our level of market access into ... something nearer Single Market levels”

which we have now.

That is just one example of the pain that the withdrawal agreement will cause. It is built around a rigid framework that is comprised of Mrs May’s red lines—leaving the single market, leaving the customs union and abandoning freedom of movement. Those red lines have boxed the UK into its own prison.

The deal fails to guarantee key human rights, environmental rights and employment rights. Of course, it also ignores the devolution settlement and rides roughshod over the powers of this Parliament, which rejected the draft deal in early December last year. The withdrawal agreement does not even mention Scotland. The withdrawal agreement was not just rejected by Scotland, but was responsible for the worst defeat of a UK Prime Minister in decades.

I agree

“that the Article 50 process should be extended so that agreement can be reached on the best way forward to protect the interests of Scotland, Wales and the UK as a whole.”

However, the EU needs to agree, and it will agree if an extension is intended to deliver real change—either dropping the red lines or holding a people’s vote. I have spoken to many senior politicians and officials in Brussels, and they will not agree to what is being called a rolling cliff edge, which would allow Mrs May more procrastination time without delivering any material change, and more time to blackmail us with no-deal threats.

It is worrying that Jacob Rees-Mogg, the leader of the anti-Europeans in the House of Commons, has hinted that he could agree to a short extension in order to achieve what he calls a “managed no deal”. That is a terrifying prospect and it is not why we want an extension.

The EU is wise to the possibility of such shenanigans; therefore, an extension of article 50 will be granted only if there is significant material change. That has to mean a second referendum. More people than ever have educated themselves about the benefits of EU membership. The lies and the cheating of the anti-Europe campaign have been exposed. It is clear that a referendum could bring us back from the cliff edge and the atavistic direction in which Brexit has taken us. That is why I want to stand with Wales tonight and will support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Because I have a little time in hand, I do not need to cut members off at exactly six minutes, but do not abuse it.

15:13

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The last time that I took part in a debate in this Parliament on Brexit, we were less than four months away from the point at which the UK will formally leave the EU. We are now less than four weeks away, and over the intervening period, despite the volatility at Westminster, one simple fact has remained: the Prime Minister’s deal represents the best way to implement the momentous decision that was taken by the electorate of the UK on 23 June 2016 to end our membership of the European Union.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The member talks about the “momentous decision” that was taken by the UK electorate. As individuals, he and I can change our minds. Is a country allowed to change its mind?

Donald Cameron: As I said in December, not to respect that vote would render us guilty of forgetting that we serve the electorate, and that service includes respecting the electorate’s decisions, which were freely expressed in a referendum on a question posed to and answered by the United Kingdom about its membership of the EU.

Jackson Carlaw has already quoted Alex Neil, who said in November 2016:

“The democratic wishes of the people have to be respected.”

I agree.

A few months ago, the cabinet secretary Mike Russell spoke about the difference between representatives and delegates and quoted Edmund Burke, who said that a representative should not sacrifice

“His unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience”

but instead

“owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

The implication was that anyone who wanted to give effect to the referendum result was repudiating their role as a representative—that they were meekly sacrificing their judgment in favour of the electorate’s opinion. I voted to remain in the EU, and I regret that we are leaving it, but leave we must, otherwise we would be betraying the wishes of this country as expressed by the

voters of this country. The Prime Minister's deal is simply the best way of achieving that outcome.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Donald Cameron: I am afraid that I would like to make some progress.

The Prime Minister's deal is currently the only deal on the table, and we must support it. In supporting it, we will give effect to the result of a democratic vote that was taken by the UK, including, not least, the million or so Scots who voted leave and whose voices in particular have been drowned out since the vote. That is what my conscience dictates and that is how I exercise my judgment as a representative. I believe that the vast majority of people whom we represent want that outcome. They want a deal that protects their jobs and their livelihoods. They want an orderly exit and to move forward. They want to move on and to get it done. They abhor the idea of departing without a deal, and they recognise that the best way to avoid that is to support the Prime Minister's deal.

It is clear that having no deal would be an awful outcome, and it is right to prevent that from happening by default. However, the best way of ending the uncertainty and avoiding having no deal is to leave with a deal by the agreed date.

Let us remind ourselves who has backed the Prime Minister's deal. Scottish business has backed it. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Scotch whisky industry, which is among the most important industries in my region and is vital for the Scottish economy, have backed it. The Scotch Whisky Association supports both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. It has said:

"If the deal is rejected, this will create considerable uncertainty for the industry".

Scottish farming has backed the deal. The NFUS has said that the deal

"will ensure that there are no hard barriers on the day we leave the European Union, and will allow trade in agricultural goods and UK food & drink to continue throughout the transition period largely as before."

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Almost every single one of, if not all, the organisations in the list of organisations that Donald Cameron mentioned endorsed a remain vote in the referendum. They have advocated the deal compared with the cataclysm of no deal. If we give the public the opportunity to vote again, what option does Donald Cameron think that those organisations would back in that referendum?

Donald Cameron: The organisations have supported the deal because it respects the result of the referendum. The NFUS said:

"This opportunity needs to be taken".

Taking the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration together, the deal provides clarity on our status as an independent coastal nation by 2020; ensures that the environment remains protected and that there is no dilution of our commitments; aims to protect trade in goods, which is crucial for our exporters; and, above all, ensures that EU citizens who live and work in the UK can continue to do so.

The SNP refuses to back the deal, which is extraordinary, because it meets many of the SNP's demands. It includes a transition period, prevents a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and offers a guarantee of EU citizens' rights and the likelihood of a customs partnership.

It is instructive to scrutinise the SNP's various positions on Brexit over the past few years. The First Minister made much play of consistency; let us see how much consistency the SNP has shown.

First, the SNP advocated EU membership. Then it advocated a differentiated deal for Scotland. Then it advocated single market and customs union membership for the UK. Then we learned from Ian Blackford that that particular ship had sailed and that, having rejected it for months, the SNP was advocating a people's vote—or was it? There was talk of a hierarchy of outcomes and preferences or of any outcome that commanded a majority. Then the SNP advocated a much narrower focus on a people's vote alone. That is a case study in opportunism. We should not be surprised by that because—

The First Minister: What Donald Cameron has just outlined has been the efforts of the SNP and the Scottish Government to find compromise. Does it ever occur to him that, had any of those efforts at compromise been accepted by the Prime Minister and the UK Government, we might not be in the sorry position that we are in right now? The failure to compromise should shame every Conservative in the land.

Donald Cameron: I do not accept that at all.

Over the past 50 years, Europe has never been a matter of principle for the SNP; it has always been a tactic to be deployed in pursuit of independence. Hours after the referendum, the First Minister announced that she would legislate for an independence referendum on the back of Scotland being taken out of the EU against its will.

The SNP has never wanted Brexit to work. Whatever deal Theresa May had negotiated with Brussels, the SNP would have opposed it. An orderly withdrawal is not in its interests; that is why it is rejecting it. The SNP's ideology has always

trumped the search for a pragmatic, orderly exit from the EU.

We support the Prime Minister in her negotiations. A deal is on the table, and there is an overarching desire across the country for us to get this done. I support the amendment in Jackson Carlaw's name.

15:20

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I support the motion in the name of the First Minister, but I will consider in some detail the amendment that is proposed by the Conservative Party and that party's actions and record, given its leading role in supporting, introducing and implementing—if that is the right word—Brexit.

The Tory amendment talks about respecting "the results of constitutional referendums".

The Tories demand respect for the votes of 52 per cent of people in 2016, but of course they have no respect for the 52 per cent of people who voted yes in 1979. There is no question of any respect for the 62 per cent of people in Scotland who voted remain. At all times and by all Tories, that remain vote has been denied, denigrated and dismissed.

We regularly hear Tory MPs who represent English constituencies proclaim that they must speak up for the views of their constituents, the majority of whom voted leave. However, the supine sub-group of Tory MPs in Scotland will never be heard speaking up for the remain majorities in their constituencies. Those Tories could not give a flying fig about the majority of their constituents who voted remain.

The next part of the Tory amendment says that the Tories

"support leaving the EU with a deal".

Let us examine the path that they have followed to get to that position. For Donald Cameron's benefit, this is perhaps a dictionary definition of opportunism. He might remember that the Tory position in 2014 was crystal clear: people should vote no to independence to guarantee Scotland's place in the EU. I know that there are one or two original Brexiteers among the Tory group, but I do not remember any of them saying in 2014 that people should vote no to guarantee Brexit. Their party said the exact opposite.

Then, in the 2016 referendum campaign, during her debates with Boris Johnson, Remainer Ruth clearly laid out the threat of economic calamity that Brexit posed, although in 2014 she had stated that that threat was likely only as a result of a vote for independence. Also in 2016, my party stood on a

platform of reserving the right to hold a referendum on independence if Scotland was forced out of the EU against its will, which is exactly what is now proposed.

After the Brexit vote, we had Demanding Davidson. The Tories were adamant that the First Minister had to put every possible effort into safeguarding Scotland's place—and, indeed, the UK's place—in the single market. That was their position after the Brexit vote. The next U-turn came when Westminster instructed all Tory MPs and MSPs to obey—no matter the cost to Scotland.

Far from demanding membership of the single market, which was their position after the referendum, the Tories in this chamber now demand that we must leave the single market. Is that not opportunism? I am happy to give way to Donald Cameron if he can define it in some other way—I see that he cannot.

Surely that volte-face would be the last Tory U-turn—the final capitulation of the craven Conservatives. But no; the Tory amendment mentions the possibility of "no deal", and where that comes into their calculations takes us to the next part of the Tory position. The final resting position of the Scottish Tories is to refuse to vote to rule out a no-deal Brexit. They had the chance to do so in the House of Commons, but every single Scottish Tory MP refused to vote to rule out a no-deal Brexit. That is unbelievable. We have gone from the avowed Euro-enthusiasm of Ruth Davidson in 2014 and 2016 to every single Scottish Tory MP demanding that a no-deal Brexit be kept on the table in 2019. Look at the Tories now—they are all looking down at their papers.

History will judge the Scottish Tories and their endless twisting and turning to accommodate every farcical and incompetent move by this utter shambles of a Tory Government. Two hundred and fifty companies have asked the Dutch Government whether they can relocate from the UK—no bother. Nissan is talking about withdrawing from the UK. Honda is closing the only plant that it has ever closed in its history, but that is no problem to the Tories. Fourteen million pounds of public money going to a freight company that has no ferries? That is no problem to the Scottish Tories—not a word of criticism from them. We hear all the time about the Scottish Tories' concerns about taxpayers' money, but £33 million of it is being handed over to another company because of a process that was so cackhanded that the Tories want to keep how bad it was a secret. That £33 million of taxpayers' money is hush money.

In the Tory Government, we have a Government that was found to be in contempt of its own Parliament at Westminster. We have a deal—the

fantastic deal, which has taken two years to reach—that a record number of MPs voted against, with a record defeat in the House of Commons. That is strong and stable government, by the way—that is the smooth transition to Brexit that we are hearing about today. We have a Tory Government that promised endlessly that Scotland’s voice would be heard, but which set a new low when it afforded a mere 18 minutes to amendments from Scotland’s MPs—amendments that were talked out by Tory ministers.

The Tories have held Scotland in contempt right through the process. They have ignored its Parliament, they have ignored its Government and they have ignored their own constituents, who voted to remain.

Surely the last word has to go to the Tory Cabinet minister who told journalist Nick Eardley that even though Scotland and the UK are heading for an “iceberg”—presumably one of Titanic proportions—Scotland has to remain strapped to the decks and has no option but to go along with what the Tory Government itself says is a disaster.

We do not have to do that; we have another choice—one that is far better than being bound to Brexit Britain. The idea that anyone in Scotland would want to vote for a shower of charlatans, whose conduct at Westminster over Brexit has been bedevilled by factions and contradictions—the idea that anybody would trust such a party to run the Scottish Parliament in 2021—is becoming nothing more than a tired joke.

Presiding Officer, as you may have guessed, I support the motion in the name of the First Minister, and I reject the Tories and their amendment.

15:27

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I support the motion. This is a significant moment in the Parliament’s history, as both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly hold simultaneous debates on this important issue. They will no doubt reach a position that rejects Theresa May’s deal, that rejects no deal and which calls for an extension of article 50.

In this afternoon’s debate, there is no doubt that the Tories are isolated—they look deeply uncomfortable in their corner of the chamber, and quite rightly so. We are in this situation because of the failure of leadership of the past two leaders of the Conservative Party, Prime Ministers David Cameron and Theresa May. Prior to the 2016 referendum, David Cameron, in seeking to navigate a way through the internal problems of the Conservative Party and placate the right, agreed to hold a referendum. He risked it as he

thought that he could win that referendum, but that was not to happen.

Adam Tomkins: Labour voted for the referendum.

James Kelly: It was a Conservative Prime Minister who came up with the plan, so there is no point in pointing at me.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If members want to make a point, they should intervene and not just heckle across the chamber.

James Kelly: The consequence of that disastrous decision was the loss of the 2016 referendum, costing David Cameron his premiership. As Patrick Harvie said, when Theresa May took over, she declared that “Brexit means Brexit” and tried to produce a solution that was in tune with that statement. However, again, the reality was that she could not navigate her way through the internal politics of the Tory party.

Theresa May went to the country in 2017 seeking a bigger majority to ensure that she could get a deal through. That went catastrophically wrong, as she ran aground on the election trail and was returned without an overall majority. Since then, she has not been able to achieve any consensus in the House of Commons, which has subsequently resulted in her losing a vote on her proposed deal by 230 votes. Now, with 25 days to go, she has resorted to simply running down the clock in the hope that, as we get nearer to 29 March, people will vote for her deal.

All around us is evidence of the implications of Brexit and of no deal. In the car industry, Honda in Swindon is closing down with the loss of 3,500 jobs, and Jaguar Land Rover continually warns of the threat of a no-deal Brexit. The implications for trading arrangements are important, because a lot of companies rely on just-in-time production to get goods into and out of the United Kingdom quickly. The Government is drawing up plans for lorry parks, but that will slow everything down and have a dramatic effect on the economic production of those car companies.

A no-deal Brexit would have drastic economic consequences. Experts have warned of the dangers to the exchange rate, with the pound being devalued by anything between 10 and 30 per cent. The Bank of England has said that inflation could rise to between 4.25 and 6.5 per cent, and that there would be consequential changes to interest rates. All that would result in implications for the real value of money and in the economy slowing down, ultimately leading to a reduction in demand and in production and resulting in job losses. There would also be an impact on the Scottish budget.

It is right that we assess the implications of where we are now and reject a no-deal Brexit on the basis of its drastic consequences. The fact is that there is no support for any option to go through the House of Commons, which means that the extension of article 50 is the next logical step in order to extend the process.

As part of that, a public vote must be considered—there must be the option to bring this back to the people. Members have pointed to the democratic result in 2016, but given the potential consequences—the job losses, the drastic impact on our communities and the reduction in people's living standards—if this goes back to a public vote, we must have the option to remain.

We have a catastrophe before us and people have been let down. To plot a way forward, we need to clearly reject a no deal, look at extending article 50 and look at options for the future, including a public vote.

15:33

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): For the past couple of months, any time that my colleagues on the SNP benches warned about the impact of a no deal, members on the Conservative benches erupted, calling on the SNP to back Theresa May's deal.

As many of us predicted, the Scottish Tories are trying to find a way to place the blame for the horrific no-deal scenario on the SNP, yet it is the SNP Government that, at every stage in the past two and a half years, has offered a detailed, sensible, pragmatic solution that would do the least damage to Scotland and the wider UK. Scotland has been ignored and dismissed by the very people who like to trot out hollow lines about Scotland being an equal partner. I am not feeling it.

Let us for a moment forget about no deal, if we can, and concentrate on what Theresa May's deal would mean for people in Scotland. Her deal would take us out of the EU customs union and the single market. That would mean a drop in GDP of more than £9 billion by 2030, which would hit Scots directly. It would mean job losses, income reduction and higher costs of living.

We have been promised trade agreements with individual countries by May's Government. Let us count the trade deals that the struggling UK Secretary of State for International Trade, Liam Fox, has secured so far. Of the world's 195 countries, Fox has managed to secure deals with only six. Israel, which is the largest among those, buys £2.4 billion-worth of UK goods and services, with £1.6 billion flowing the other way. At the other end of the scale, Fox managed to get Eritrea and Comoros, both of which bought no UK goods or

services last year. The total sum of those six deals is a tiny fraction of what we currently trade across the EU. Currently, 44 per cent of all UK exports are to the EU. That is not being replaced.

Negotiating trade deals is hugely complex. Deals frequently amount to hundreds of clauses, covering standards and tariffs on vast numbers of products. Liam Fox was told that by trade experts. Fox hubristically said in response that the negotiation of 40 trade deals post-Brexit—the minute after, the second after—would be

“the easiest in human history”.

Well, he has had nearly three years to do it. Where are the deals?

We know that one of May's absolute red lines is to get rid of freedom of movement. After all, this is the woman who created the frankly racist hostile environment, including the appalling Windrush scandal and the appalling “go home” vans.

Brexit is, in large part, the love child of wilful misinformation and right-wing dog-whistle politics. Brexiters were quite happy to encourage finger pointing at immigration and EU membership, when in fact those who feel let down and disenfranchised are really the victims of perpetual economic failings of successive UK Governments.

The simple fact is that freedom of movement has boosted Scotland's economy. May's deal means Scotland will lose out on attracting thousands of working-age, tax-paying people who enrich our communities. Those are the people who staff our hospitals and clinics, drive our trains, care for our ageing population, train our graduates and allow our food and drink industry to expand and prosper internationally. Our native-born population is not enough to fill those jobs.

The proposed immigration cap immediately bars people earning less than £30,000 from getting a work visa. That rules out people on starting salaries as university researchers, teachers, nurses, care workers, hospitality workers and many more. The policy is also discriminatory to women, who—I am sorry to say—are more likely to be earning under £30,000.

May's deal also means that we will no longer have access to EU funding programmes and financial support. Those include infrastructure programmes that have co-funded roads in the most remote parts of Scotland, and research programmes that have meant that Scotland's hospitals and universities have been at the forefront of developing ground-breaking and often life-saving technology, including everything from finding cures for heart disease and the next generation of MRI scanners, to flood prevention, marine protection and robotics.

We are losing LEADER funding; every community that each of us in the chamber represents has projects that rely on that. We are losing £11 billion of regional development funding. Stick that on the side of a bus.

I have only touched the surface of why May's deal is so bad for Scotland and the wider UK. However, she still seems to think that she can bribe enough MPs to get the deal through. In addition to the £1 billion DUP pay-off, she is throwing money to English MPs in a last-ditch attempt to bribe them into some kind of submission. Yet May has offered no such bungs to Scotland and, while we are at it, no such bungs to Wales. She does not have to, because, in the case of the Scottish Tory MPs, they are not fighting for what is best for Scotland. The MP in my area, in which over 62 per cent voted to remain, is not representing the area's views. The majority are submissively toeing the line on her deal, while those on the lunatic fringes are content with no deal, despite their constituencies being the worst hit.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): What does the member say to her constituents in the north-east fishing industry, who would say that they cannot wait to get out of the common fisheries policy?

Gillian Martin: I will tell the member exactly what I say to my constituents in that industry. The majority of my constituents who work in the north-east fishing industry are in the processing sector. On average, about 80 per cent of the processing sector's workforce are EU economic migrants. If that flow stalls, fish processing factories in my constituency could have to close down.

I am sad to say that, despite the fact that so many of the Scottish Tory MSPs campaigned against Brexit, including their leaders, they, too, will not stand up for what is best for Scotland's economy, as Liam Kerr has just illustrated. For that, the people of Scotland, who stand on the cusp of feeling Brexit's negative implications and the direct impact that it will have on their lives and their pockets, will never forgive them.

Article 50 must be extended and a new deal must be reached that drops the Prime Minister's damaging red lines and will not harm every individual who lives in Scotland. I am glad that my party continues to provide clarity of position in the midst of the Brexit madness that has been caused by the Tory party, and I am glad to stand with colleagues in Wales to let sense prevail.

15:40

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I would like to start my remarks on what I hope will be a point of agreement across the chamber. I do

not want to see a no-deal Brexit, which I believe would be damaging to Scotland's economy. Indeed, we have heard a host of warnings from those in business across Scotland as to what a no-deal Brexit might mean. It is precisely because we should avoid a no-deal Brexit that we should be supporting a withdrawal agreement. That is the opportunity that the House of Commons had back in January. At that time, voices across Scotland urged support for the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement. As we have heard, it was backed by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce; the Scotch Whisky Association; senior companies such as Diageo; entrepreneurs such as Sir Ian Wood; NFU Scotland; and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. Many of those bodies accepted that the withdrawal agreement was not perfect but believed that it was a necessary step to take to avoid a no-deal scenario.

Daniel Johnson: The fundamental fact is that the withdrawal agreement was not backed by Parliament. Therefore, does Mr Fraser agree that a no-deal Brexit, which he accepts is an outcome that nobody wants, should be ruled out, as the Confederation of British Industry has argued?

Murdo Fraser: The way to rule out a no-deal Brexit is to vote for a deal. It cannot be ruled out in the abstract.

I regret that members of the Labour Party, members of the SNP, members of the Liberal Democrats and, yes, some members of the Conservative Party voted against the withdrawal agreement in the House of Commons and put us at risk of a no-deal Brexit. If we want to avoid that outcome, we must vote for a deal.

There were members in the House of Commons who were concerned about the Irish backstop question, and the House of Commons later demonstrated that if those concerns could be dealt with, a majority would exist for the withdrawal agreement. That is why the Prime Minister has continued to negotiate with the EU27. If a solution to the backstop can be found, we will have a way forward. We need to find a way through the current situation, because it is important that the Government of the United Kingdom delivers on the outcome of the EU referendum. To fail to do so would be a democratic outrage.

As Jackson Carlaw said, we should not forget that more than 1 million Scots voted leave in 2016. To listen to some SNP members, one would think that that group has been airbrushed out of history, yet the biggest single component of those 1 million Scots were SNP voters. It is those self-same SNP voters who, in large numbers, switched to the Conservatives in the general election in 2017, so disillusioned were they with the SNP's stance.

I know that there are members here who believe that we should have a so-called people's vote—in other words, a rerun of the 2016 referendum. We know that that is the SNP position and the Liberal Democrat position, and we think that it might be the Labour position, depending on what day of the week it is. However, we have already had a people's vote. We had it in 2016 and the people made their choice. It seems to me that it is fundamentally dangerous, at a time when there is already so much distrust of our political institutions, for the establishment to say, in effect, to the people, "You've made the wrong choice, and we're going to keep asking you the same question until you give us the right answer." What could be more dangerous for democracy than that?

Patrick Harvie: I will tell Mr Fraser what would be more dangerous to democracy than that: failing to call out the fundamental corruption of the leave campaign. They are the people who are culpable, not the people who voted leave.

Murdo Fraser: For somebody who was part of the yes campaign—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser—please wait until you are called. I call Murdo Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

For somebody who was part of the yes campaign in 2014, which we now know told us a pack of lies about what an independent Scotland would be like, Mr Harvie has a cheek to talk about somebody else's campaign. *[Interruption.]*

A range of practical questions about a second referendum has not been answered. A referendum would take at least six months to organise, which means that the earliest that it could be held would be in September. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me—I have no idea what you are saying because of the rumbling from your own ranks.

Murdo Fraser: Keep them in order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am, Mr Fraser. I do not need lessons from you to keep the chamber in order. Continue.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

A second referendum would take at least six months to organise—

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: Not just now.

The earliest that we could contemplate holding that referendum would be in September. What

would the question be? There are at least four different possible outcomes that people want from this process. Some people want no Brexit at all, some want Brexit on the Prime Minister's terms, some want Brexit on other terms—as yet undefined—and some want a no-deal Brexit. How can we have a referendum that would give a majority for any one of those propositions?

Nor is there much evidence that a second referendum would have a different result from the last one. The opinion polls on the remain or leave question show that remain would have a small lead. That is exactly what the opinion polls told us in advance of the 2016 referendum, so the chances are that we would go through the expense, trouble and delay of a second referendum and end up exactly where we started.

The reality is that the SNP knows that. Quoted in *The Herald* on 12 February, a "senior SNP source" said of the people's vote campaign:

"It's dead and everyone knows it. Many people in the party are taking this view now".

For all their rhetoric about how bad a no-deal Brexit would be, many in the SNP actually want no deal because they believe that it would drive up support for Scottish independence. That, after all, is the only issue that matters to the SNP. From the very start, it has seen Brexit as an opportunity to advance the independence agenda.

Within hours of the referendum result being announced back in June 2016, Nicola Sturgeon was on her feet in Bute house, telling the world that she was instructing her civil servants to draw up legislation for a second independence referendum. Everything that the SNP has said and everything that it has done since that point has been about independence and nothing else. Fortunately, the Scottish people have more sense. There is no evidence of support for independence growing; indeed, people are increasingly angry at SNP opportunism over Brexit.

We need to avoid no deal. We can do that by backing the withdrawal agreement. That was the case in January and it is still the case today. It is what business wants, it is what farming wants and it is what fishing wants; it is clearly in Scotland's interests. We should get on and vote for it before more uncertainty and damage are caused.

15:48

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): One thing on which I agree with Murdo Fraser is that the people of Scotland know better—that is why he has never won an election in Scotland in his puff.

As we are all aware, for the first time in 20 years of devolution, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales are debating and

voting on the same motion. Together, we are declaring our opposition to the damaging EU exit deal agreed by the UK Government. This is an unprecedented event and I think that it speaks volumes.

The Prime Minister's deal has the power to cause major, lasting damage to jobs, living standards and public services. In over 20 years of devolution, never before has something had the power to affect our two countries in such a way. As parliamentarians, we can use our voices for change. I can only hope that the UK Government takes stock of what has brought us here and why Wales and Scotland are jointly taking this historic step.

With that in mind, I am delighted to stand up in our nation's Parliament and reiterate the message that has been put forward countless times by our First Minister, by Mike Russell and by my colleagues who have already spoken in this debate. Scotland did not want this. It is not the choice we made. Our message to Theresa May is clear—rule out a no-deal Brexit, extend the article 50 process and consider another referendum.

From the beginning, the twists and turns of the Brexit process in Westminster have resembled a comedic pantomime rather than the work of a functioning Government. We can all agree that we are no further forward now than we were two years ago. Like many people, I enjoy a good pantomime—we see them quite a lot in here—but I certainly did not expect that to come straight from the stages of Westminster, filled with the usual panto cast of characters such as the bumbling baddie, a “Will they, won't they?” plot line and more dodgy one-liners than a 1970s Saturday night television variety show.

The House of Commons would have been entertaining over the past few months if the issue had not been so serious. We are asked to trust the UK Government as it attempts to drive us off the Brexit cliff edge. Is it any wonder that, with 24 days to go, people across our country have lost faith in the UK Government? The current withdrawal agreement means that Scotland faces being taken out of the EU against our democratic wishes, taken out of the single market against our economic interests and cut off from our European friends and neighbours against our will. We are not okay with that, and we have made that fact blatantly clear since the day and hour when the Brexit process began, but we have been repeatedly ignored and sidelined.

I cannot say that I am surprised that the Westminster Government has handled the process as badly as it has done. Just when we think that enough is surely enough, the cycle of broken promises, disappointment and confusion continues to spin out of control. The Scottish

Parliament rejected the draft deal in December last year yet, time and again, our First Minister has reached out and attempted to establish an open and constructive dialogue, only to be shot down and ignored. The exit deal that is on the table does not mention Scotland even once within its 500-plus pages and, on top of that, it fails to guarantee key rights—human rights, environmental rights and employment rights—that Scotland needs and wants and should never be forced to give up.

Theresa May's current approach would take Scotland out of the single market, despite the clear fact that 62 per cent of Scots voted to remain. Ever since the Brexit vote, our First Minister has been clear that the voice of the Scottish people should be respected. As a minimum, that means staying in the single market and the customs union. If it is possible for Northern Ireland, why not for Scotland? Yet again, the UK Government simply does not seem to care about Scotland's wishes.

The economic implications of all this are startling at best. Analysis that the UK Government published last week predicts that a no-deal Brexit could leave the UK economy 9 per cent smaller after 15 years. If 15 years seems far away, we should consider the Scottish Government analysis that has shown that the implications of a no-deal Brexit would be felt almost instantly in Scotland. There is potential for GDP to contract by 7 per cent by the end of this year alone and for unemployment to increase by nearly 4 per cent by mid-2020, which is the equivalent of more than 100,000 additional people out of work.

After a decade of unforgiving Tory austerity, things are already hard enough for many people in my constituency. As members know, I love my town, and I bring issues that are of importance to Paisley to the chamber as often as I can. Although that is frequently mentioned in friendly jest by colleagues, this is not a joking matter. Brexit of any kind will have generational negative consequences for many families in my community. I live in a wonderful town that I love serving, and I will do my utmost to ensure that Paisley continues to flourish, but that is getting increasingly difficult under a Westminster Government that continues to demonstrate beyond any doubt that Scotland is not an equal partner in the UK. The lack of respect that is being shown to us is appalling, especially when all the signs point towards Brexit having a devastating impact on jobs and investment in our country.

Like other members, I have no idea what will happen in the coming weeks, but I know one thing: it is time for Scotland's voice to be heard. Why should we continue to be treated like an unruly child who is told to be seen and not heard? Scotland did not want Brexit. The time has come

for us to gain some control of our future. We cannot continue to be led by the shambolic UK Government. The people of Scotland deserve better and a lot more than what Westminster offers.

15:54

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

The debate is significant, as we are here to express united opposition to a no-deal Brexit. The voices of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will join together to make clear our opposition to an outcome that would damage our economy, communities and society. The UK is possibly on the brink of leaving the EU. During negotiations, the prospect of a no-deal Brexit has loomed, but a no-deal scenario should have been ruled out of negotiations. I do not accept the argument that that scenario has been necessary to demonstrate a level of resolve or seriousness.

I also do not think that anyone who has been involved in the negotiations has treated them as a game. Everyone can see that any attempt by the UK to use brinkmanship would result only in self-inflicted harm. The argument that it would be just as bad for the EU is thin. The 27 countries would still be a powerful group, as far as trading, international relationships and influence are concerned, while the UK would be left isolated. From an international point of view, we would be the country that had failed to reach an agreement with the EU—a trading bloc that is enormously attractive to other countries—although we had been negotiating with the huge advantage of having already been aligned. That hardly makes us look competent.

A no-deal exit would have an immediate impact on people's daily lives. It would mean having no transition period. Prices in shops would shoot up as we moved to World Trade Organization rules. Our own trading goods might be surplus, and food stocks would rot. Travelling to the EU would become bureaucratic and drawn out, and there is still no clarity on how flights would be dealt with. The issue of the Irish border would be unresolved, with a hardening currently looking unavoidable. Surely it is inconceivable that the UK could leave on such damaging terms. Yet, there are senior politicians who believe that it is a preference. Some even argue that leaving with no deal would provide us with opportunities. That is nonsense, and it is not possible to find any serious authority in favour of that argument. It is no secret that, about a year ago, when we were granted access to UK Government leaked papers on three Brexit scenarios, they referred to the negative impact that leaving with no deal would have on economic growth and our economy. It is not credible that,

after that analysis, a no-deal scenario could be pursued.

The UK Parliament remains divided. This is a crisis in UK politics, and it is not acceptable for the UK Government to try to secure the vote with packages of money for areas of the UK on which it has forced austerity, that it has neglected and which it is set to damage even further with either a poor Brexit deal or a catastrophic no-deal exit.

The sensible approach to adopt now is to request an extension to the article 50 process, to enable the Parliament and the country to agree a level of consensus. There are a number of options and scenarios for what comes next. An extension is necessary, as the clock has been run down so far that, even with a deal, there is not enough time to scrutinise and pass the necessary legislation. My view is that there should be a more meaningful extension. The lack of a deal with parliamentary support is the responsibility of a Government that has been closed, obdurate and secretive and has made little attempt to engage meaningfully with parliamentary committees both here and at Westminster. If there was ever a time for the UK Government to take Opposition parties and Parliament with it, that time is now, and the same can be said for dealing with the devolved Governments.

The referendum result has left us in a situation that I do not want to be in—one that I campaigned against and that is extremely challenging. After the referendum was a time for unity. It needed the Prime Minister to recognise the narrowness of the result and to attempt to chart a course that was mindful of how divisive the referendum had been, what the result meant for the country's economic future, what it said about the kind of country we are, how we engage with other countries and how we treat and value people who wish to come and live here.

I am a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, which has been taking evidence on the article 50 negotiations. In January, we had a series of meetings in Brussels, prior to the meaningful vote. From the perspective of the EU 27, the deal was done. They had negotiated in good faith with the Prime Minister. It was not their job to get the deal through the UK Parliament; they had already got 27 member states to agree to it. It might not have been unreasonable for them to have assumed that the Prime Minister was negotiating with a degree of authority. However, a general election that resulted in a minority Government, a Conservative Party that is riven over Europe, and a marriage of convenience with the Democratic Unionist Party that is turning out to be not particularly convenient leave the Prime Minister in a weak position in her own country. Trying to build consensus in the UK

Parliament at the last minute, when MPs have never had influence over or ownership of the deal, will lead to failure or—if the manoeuvres of the last few days do get it through—a coalition that is cobbled together and acting in its own interests rather than those of the whole country. A deal agreed in Parliament on such terms would be unacceptable.

We are looking at the prospect of a people's vote. If there were an amendment to support a public vote—a type of ratification vote—that is expected to have the support of Parliament. Those circumstances, or another route towards a public vote, demand a realistic delay to the article 50 process. It was the Prime Minister who decided on 29 March 2019 as exit day, but that is no longer realistic under any scenario.

Undoing our years of EU membership and our trading, environmental, social and judicial ties is proving to be difficult, complicated and disadvantageous to the UK. At a time of global uncertainty, with old and new threats and challenges, countries should co-operate more in addressing issues such as climate change, food insecurity, extremism and poverty.

With or without the UK, the EU will continue to play a leadership role on the international stage, promote important values and protect its citizens' rights. We should strive to remain part of that community.

16:00

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Aleksandr Orlov is not necessarily the most obvious of Brexiteers; first, he does not actually exist but, as with the ferry company that owned no ferries, why let the facts get in the way of a good, old-fashioned and terribly British joke?

Promise £350 million on the side of a bus. Watch on as a young MP is murdered while attending her surgery. Shout "Simples" at the SNP leader in Westminster, all for a bet about afternoon tea. What an absolute embarrassment this country has become.

Today, we join forces with our Welsh colleagues in a show of solidarity against the recklessness that has consumed our politics since 23 June 2016. Nine hundred and eighty-five days later, we have no clarity for business; 985 days later, our EU nationals live in fear of what is to come; and 985 days later, the Prime Minister has no deal—but not to worry chaps, because it is "Simples". Yes, the Prime Minister of this country would rather quote a computer-generated meerkat than face up to the political catastrophe that Brexit has become. Shame on her.

The debate is designed to send a message to the Prime Minister. If Theresa May would rather abdicate responsibility for Brexit, let her try to ignore the voices of the people whose lives her inaction continues to make a misery of. I will tell members about four voices from my community, which come from four women—all EU nationals—who are from my constituency in Fife.

Nicole Penman from Kennoway worked at Haig's in Markinch and for our national health service. She has lived in Scotland since 1977 and she married a Scot. She has paid her taxes and continues to do so on her pensions. She said to me:

"I can't understand why we should be on a separate database to target us for what we have to wonder."

Is it that

"we cannot be trusted? I wonder if Theresa May is using us as a bargaining chip?"

What about Annette Zimmermann, who has lived with her partner in Scotland for years and regards Fife as her home? She spoke about the toxic atmosphere that Brexit has enabled and about her feelings of stress and anxiety. Yesterday, Annette was travelling back to the UK. She was advised that her passport should now electronically indicate settled status and she explained that to border security. However, she told me:

"Not only did nothing show, but the border control officer did not even know what I was referring to when I explained that the settled status is supposed to come up electronically. Even when I produced the"

settled status

"letter, he seemed utterly clueless, had clearly not been briefed and nothing was showing on the machine either".

What about Dr Petra McLay, who has dedicated her working life in this country to educating our children? As she is a German national, her ability to apply for UK citizenship does not depend on her contributions to this country over the past 15 years; rather, it is predicated on her wealth and comes at a price tag of £1,300.

What about a fourth constituent—a woman who turned up at my surgery last week in tears because she has been refused universal credit as a result of being classed as not habitually resident? Her entitlement to benefits has never before been queried but, now, Brexit allows the authorities to do exactly that and to make her feel alien in a country that she has lived in since the age of three.

This is the hostile environment that Brexit has created for EU nationals. Theresa May must rule out no deal. I say to Donald Cameron—although he is no longer in the chamber—that she must do that not for my party, for Plaid Cymru, for Labour,

for the Greens or for the Liberals but for the EU nationals who live side by side with us all in this country.

I support a people's vote because I want an end to the sorry mess that Brexit has become. I understand that there are those in the Conservative Party and elsewhere who do not agree. I respect their right to disagree, but what is unforgivable is their abject failure to rule out no deal. They know the damage that no deal would cause—many have said as much—but, by blithely refusing to rule it out, they deliberately belittle this Parliament and the Welsh Assembly in the process.

Jackson Carlaw's amendment is nothing short of a disgrace. I hope that every EU citizen who works in this Parliament, who serves Jackson Carlaw his lunch, who works on our parliamentary committees supporting members and who monitors the security in this building remembers it. It is loud and clear what the leader of the Opposition believes: "Leave it alone, Holyrood; let the big boys sort it out."

Jackson Carlaw conveniently forgets that it is precisely because we have left it to Westminster that, with 24 days to go, we have no clarity on what Brexit means for the United Kingdom. Today is ultimately a test of devolution. Today, Scotland and Wales, which are the second and third largest countries in this so-called United Kingdom, seek to challenge that lack of clarity as two united legislatures. Will the Prime Minister finally listen?

This Parliament works best when we are united. Yes, there are some in this place who wish our politics to be small, but the rest of us have a responsibility to our constituents, to raise the level of our political discourse above that of a meerkat and above a Prime Minister who would rather depend on the votes of the DUP than act in the best interests of the people of this country.

In my classroom, I used to have the Edwin Morgan poem "Open the Doors!" pinned proudly to the wall. I close with his words:

"We give you our consent to govern, don't pocket it and ride away.
We give you our deepest dearest wish to govern well, don't say we have no mandate to be so bold.
We give you this great building, don't let your work and hope be other than great".

Let us do great work here today and, with the support of our Welsh colleagues, let history remember the Conservative Party and Prime Minister Theresa May for their abject failure to do the right thing for the people of this country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I have a little time in hand, so I can give extra time for interventions, if there are any.

16:06

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I think that everybody in the chamber, whatever our political views and however we voted on Brexit, fully acknowledges that the 2016 referendum result has led us to one of the most difficult periods that there has ever been in British politics. Recognising the complexities and difficulties of Brexit has made us question a lot about ourselves, but has also raised questions about the political process and how it operates.

Brexit has been deeply troubling—it has been emotive and divisive in exactly the same way as the independence referendum in 2014—but, as we try very hard to take an objective stance on the current debate, we should remember three things. First, we have a democratic duty as politicians to respect the result of the referendum, even if we personally do not like that result. Secondly, rather than watching endless wrangling over constitutional structures, voters want us to focus on an outcome that works for them and their families. Thirdly, as we listen to the public, we must also carefully listen to those sectors on which our economic future depends, especially in business and industry. The majority, if not all of them believe that we should support the deal.

We should also acknowledge that, in 2014, when the people of Scotland made a decision to stay in the United Kingdom, and in 2016, when the people of the UK made a decision to withdraw from the EU, they made those decisions when the terms of the plebiscite were agreed beforehand. That agreement embodied an acceptance by both sides that the result of the referendum would stand.

As I said in the previous Brexit debate in this chamber, I was very disappointed by the EU referendum result. I strongly believed that the economic reasons for remaining in the EU—Willie Rennie mentioned some of them—were powerful and I believed that a majority would think so. I was wrong.

John Mason: Individuals and organisations can change their minds. We can respect the vote, but what if the country wants to change its mind? Should it not have that opportunity?

Liz Smith: If we continually go back to the people because we have not accepted what they said in the first place—and the terms were agreed—we are in danger of undermining our democracy, which is very precious to everybody in this chamber.

Like many others who voted to remain, I had to accept that people made a decision that I did not. There are some interesting points to make in that regard. In all the tortuous negotiations and the reaction to them, we have seen a constant battle

between respecting the democratic will of the people—in other words, ridding British politics of all the things that were seen by the 52 per cent to be the disadvantages of an increasingly bureaucratic EU, especially in having too much control over our laws and borders—and preserving those aspects that were seen to be advantageous, the overwhelming number of which were economic.

The country has been faced with a national debate that has played out across the land and within families, according to different criteria predominating among leave and remain voters, and we need to respect that fact—something which, in my view, has never been accepted by some on the right wing of my party or by some in the SNP who have persistently implied that the Scottish electorate was not divided in its opinion on Brexit when, of course, it was.

That is why we have seen a constant use of Brexit as the *raison d'être* for the promotion of independence for Scotland. As I have said before, and will say again, the arguments for Scottish independence are seen by many as amounting to a perfectly coherent political belief, which is why, in 2012, the Edinburgh agreement was signed by the Scottish and UK Governments to allow that political belief to be tested in a referendum. That referendum was lost. There was not a sufficient number of voters who were persuaded of the benefits of an independent Scotland. The economic analysis was not judged to be in an independent Scotland's favour. Not enough people were persuaded that Scotland was better off outside the UK. However, some in the SNP have never accepted that, just as some in the Conservative Party are not prepared to accept the outcome of the Brexit debate.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to the member for giving way. She debates in her usual calm and thoughtful tone, and I respect that. However, she seems much more focused on the 2014 referendum than on the consequences of the 2016 one. Does she acknowledge that the people she has spoken of who want an end to the wrangling will be deeply disappointed if this is not only the beginning of a Brexit process but the beginning of 10 or 20 more years of figuring out what happens after Brexit? The only way to draw a line under this is to give them the chance to cancel it.

Liz Smith: I say to Mr Harvie that the people who are going to be most upset and to whom we should be listening most are those who have given us an unqualified view that getting on with the decision is in the interests of our jobs, our investment and the way in which Scotland operates in the future. Murdo Fraser and Donald Cameron gave us the views of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the heads of the UK's

four national farmers unions, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, major sectors such as the Scotch Whisky Association and major companies such as Diageo. Those people are not arguing about the abstract and finer points of the constitution; they are arguing about what is best for their sectors and for our livelihoods after Brexit.

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I think that I must finish.

It is on that basis that I say that we must respect what has happened in this referendum, even if we do not personally agree with the outcome. If we do not respect it, we are seriously in danger of undermining our democracy.

16:13

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate, although, like many in the chamber, I wish that we did not have to have it. I find it deeply regrettable that we are in this situation. That our situation is regrettable was underscored for me yesterday when I visited St Benedict's high school in Linwood, in my constituency. The young people I saw there are of a generation that will be deprived of opportunities and chances that my generation and preceding ones might have taken for granted. Nevertheless, when I engage with young people, I always seek to be positive and to discuss the future, regardless of the situations that we find ourselves in. Nothing affords that more than an opportunity to talk to a modern studies class.

Yesterday, when I spoke to the modern studies class in St Benedict's high school, I was asked a range of questions, some of which were about my personal background and some of which were about matters as trivial as the names of my pugs. However, one question floored me. I am often asked what the responsibilities of an MSP are and I am able to list them, but this time I was asked, "What is your biggest responsibility as an MSP?" That gave me pause for thought. What is the biggest responsibility of an MSP—we who are privileged to sit and stand at these desks in our national Parliament, who might be here for only a fleeting period?

I do not want to sound too grandiose in saying this, but I believe that our biggest responsibility is the duty to preserve and strengthen democracy, particularly as we find ourselves, at the end of this decade, in a world in which populism and even extremism are rearing their ugly features, whether we are talking about Trump in the United States, the Front National in France, Alternative für

Deutschland or the regimes that are currently in power in Poland and Hungary and the groups that are menacing democracies elsewhere across the continent.

When members of all parties speak of the importance of respecting the result in 2016, I take that very seriously. It is a well-made point. However, it is also a point that requires further discussion and debate. First, we have to ask ourselves why people voted to leave. Why did more than 17 million people in the UK—a majority in England, a majority in Wales and more than a third of our fellow Scots—choose to vote leave? I think that people did that for a number of reasons, but I suspect that only a very small number did it for ideological reasons in that they imagined the UK taking the role of a Hong Kong on steroids in the mid-Atlantic, as a buccaneering free-trade state. I also think that only a very small minority voted leave because they thought that regulations that are made in Europe impinge on their lives in a negative way. Rather, I believe that the driver of much of the leave vote, particularly in many communities in England, was the gross and entrenched economic and geographical inequalities that exist throughout the UK, with jobs lost over decades to globalisation and automation. There was also the persistent scapegoating of immigration by the right-wing tabloid press.

Legitimate and genuine sentiments of anger and frustration were hijacked and manipulated by a class of—frankly—Tory ideologues at Westminster, who have never reconciled themselves to the loss of an empire that predates their own births. That idea has been brilliantly explored and written about by the Irish writer and commentator Fintan O'Toole. What were people voting for if not for ideological purity or for the return of empire? I believe that, for many, it was about frustration. They wanted to send a message that they were tired of the inequality that persists in many parts of the UK and wanted something different. For those people, it was a vote for hope, as was the case for people who voted for Trump. I disagree with those people and I do not think that their vote will deliver what they wanted, but I accept that it was a vote for something. If we fail to understand that, we are in danger of not being able to address the fundamental issues and drivers that led people to vote leave.

Liam Kerr: Is the member not failing to understand that a whole lot of people in the north-east voted to come out because they wanted to come out of the common fisheries policy?

Tom Arthur: I recognise the range of reasons for people voting to come out, and my party's position on the CFP has been well known for decades. However, there was a broad suite of

reasons for the vote, and it is incumbent on parliamentarians to explore them.

The question is, will Brexit deliver for the people who voted for it? Will it address their concerns? If we are honest with ourselves, we know perfectly well that it will not do so. It will not, in itself, address inequality. It will not address lack of opportunity.

Fundamentally, the withdrawal agreement that has been produced is unworkable. It is riddled with irreconcilable paradoxes, such as the paradox of wanting close association with the European Union while having the capacity to engage with other nations on trade. It is simply not possible to have both. It seeks to reduce immigration, but the reality is that, if we are to get anywhere in trade negotiations with China or India, there will have to be relaxation of visa rules. We have already seen an increase in immigration from outside the EU, and such immigration will offset the immigration that was coming from within the EU.

We want to preserve standards and present Britain and the UK as a world-class producer of goods, but leaving the EU will mean compromising our standards, as has been made clear by the revelations about what the United States will demand in trade negotiations. The withdrawal agreement does not confront those issues; it sits in a state of paradox. It is not unlike the paradox of Buridan's ass, which tells of a donkey that is equidistant between a bucket of water and a haystack. The starving, dehydrated donkey cannot choose which one to go for, so it dies. That is the reality of the withdrawal agreement.

Buridan's paradox is about the difference between determinism and free will. The issue of determinism is important, because the withdrawal agreement is the result of red lines that the Prime Minister did not have to set. Those red lines have led to this path; the negotiation, which has led to the miserable compromise that cannot command the support of the House of Commons, is the result of a Prime Minister having shown utter incompetence not only in setting the red lines but in triggering article 50—the one card that she could play—prematurely.

The Presiding Officer is indicating that my time is up. I hope that I have been able to contribute something to the debate.

16:20

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in the debate, in part because it is an historic occasion on which we are debating side by side with our colleagues in the Welsh Assembly.

It also allows me to return to the topic of my first speech. Europe is a defining issue for my politics. In my first speech here, I hoped that it would not be a defining issue for this Parliament. Unfortunately it is, for one simple reason: Brexit and remaining in Europe or how we exit are not just theoretical issues for my constituents but are very real and immediate concerns. I will reflect on what Jenny Gilruth said, because those human consequences really matter. The issue is about people's jobs, livelihoods and families.

About 10 per cent of my constituents are non-UK EU citizens. In the King's Buildings, which belong to the University of Edinburgh, in my constituency, around 17 per cent of staff—about a third of the academics—are EU citizens. The financial services industry also employs tens of thousands of such people directly and indirectly. Standard Life has 500,000 retail customers in Germany—just one country in the EU—whom it will not be able to serve if we do not retain passporting as part of our membership of the single market. It has already had to make the decision to open offices and register new companies in other parts of Europe in order to do that. With three weeks to go, we still cannot say what is going to happen. When those people come to my surgeries on Saturdays, I cannot explain to them what they should expect on 30 March. Even the settled status process—that fundamental issue of whether people will have the right to stay here—will not open fully until 30 March, the day after Brexit is supposed to happen. That is why this debate is so important.

Let me turn to the issue at hand. Much of the debate has been about the false options that have been provided, such as an option to trade either with Europe or with the rest of the world. The reality is that, after four decades of our membership of the EU, during which globalisation has expanded hugely, we are not talking about trading just with the EU, because our membership of the EU has provided us with a passport to trade with the rest of the world. We enjoy the benefits of 750 international agreements through our membership of the EU—750 agreements that we will need to replace if we want to continue to enjoy the benefits of them. That is why the Government's estimate for crashing out on World Trade Organization rules is that it would cost the United Kingdom's economy 9.3 per cent of GDP.

It is not even as simple as that. The issue is often presented as though there is a rule book ready and waiting for us to make use of, but even the WTO says that it would take three months to agree the tariffs and quotas in order to trade on those terms. That is only if we accept that the WTO is able to function. The United States has continued to frustrate its ability to operate; it refuses to replace arbitration panel members, as

the *Financial Times* reported yesterday. Companies such as Honda, Nissan, Ford and Jaguar Land Rover are having to make decisions now about putting their investments elsewhere, either in Europe or in the rest of the world. That is why there are real concerns about medicines and radioisotopes and the ability of people to get the healthcare that they need.

With 24 days to go, people have a right to ask how on earth we have arrived at this situation. We face an unprecedented—but, more importantly, foreseeable and avoidable—economic shock that the UK Government is willingly taking us towards. The UK Conservative Government is deficient in the first duty of Government, which is to provide its citizens with security and stability.

From the outset, the UK Government's approach to Brexit has been chaotic and dictated by its own internal agendas. It has taken an ostrich-like approach of denial about the impact of Brexit and the fact that it may not have support for its deal—which it should have realised when the deal was comprehensively voted down in the House of Commons—but also denial of the reality of what it could achieve through a Brexit deal. It was in denial about the four freedoms of the EU, which the EU consistently said were non-negotiable. Despite that, the UK continued with its approach.

Patrick Harvie put it well. When the result of the referendum first came in—with its narrowness and the issues at hand—many of us expected a deal to come forward that was a compromise reflecting the fact that 48 per cent of people in the United Kingdom voted to remain. Instead, we had the nonsense of "Brexit means Brexit", which Theresa May used to conceal the fact that she was pursuing a hard Brexit that was being dictated to the UK Government by the European research group—a party within a party. Anyone who listened to "Good Morning Scotland" today and heard Mark Francois dictate the terms on which the European research group would accept the deal could be under no illusions about that. He talked about a panel of experts—including Bill Cash—who would judge whatever Theresa May brought back to the House of Commons. That is a nonsense. It is no way in which to run a country. It is no way in which to govern. It is governing on the basis of short-term calculation rather than national interest and on the basis of soundbites rather than facts and reason. That is why we should reject the deal.

It is disappointing to hear the Tories offer the straw man of the choice being between May's deal and no deal. Many of their colleagues in the House of Commons have had the courage to speak up and say that we must rule out a no-deal exit. It is hugely disappointing to hear not one

Conservative member speak up in the debate against that ridiculous and dangerous proposition. At the vote today, some of them should have the courage to rule out a no-deal exit, because ruling that out would be in the interests of the United Kingdom.

16:27

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The Tories do not want to hear this again, so I am going to say it again. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. Our interests are now being ignored by a shambling UK Government that wants to drag Scotland out of Europe, whatever Scots or this Parliament might think about it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Dr Allan. Can members stop the private conversations? Please do not come into the chamber and immediately start talking across benches.

Dr Allan: Since Brexit is close enough now to qualify for its own grim Advent calendar, let me put this as nicely as I can to the Tories: Brexit is now just 24 sleeps away.

After almost three years of self-ecoriation, the UK Government will now ask Westminster to back a damaging deal—an astonishing 17 days before Brexit is scheduled to happen. To use a vivid Scots expression, Theresa May's deal has been sewit wi a het needle an a burnin threid.

Article 50 must now be extended to prevent a no-deal departure and bring the issue back to the people. No deal—which some Brexiteers still talk of as if it can be briskly and harmlessly achieved by gunboat—would have consequences across Scotland, not least in my constituency. As much as 24 per cent of the workforce of the Western Isles is employed in sectors that are considered to be most exposed to the effects of no deal. Analysis from the chief economic adviser to the Scottish Government shows that a no-deal Brexit would lead to a 10 to 20 per cent drop in exports, £1 billion less investment in 2019 and a 10 to 30 per cent depreciation in the pound. The UK Government has failed to offer a single meaningful assurance to any of those businesses.

As the First Minister said today, the Scottish Government has sought to find compromises to protect Scotland's interests all the way through this sorry process. It was depressing to hear again today the idea of compromise being dismissed by the Conservatives. There is an obvious lesson about what happens when another Government makes Scotland's decisions for it—and there are, of course, obvious remedies.

In my constituency, a restaurant owner has been in touch to say that rising food prices are already impacting on his business, an artist has written to me with concerns about customs arrangements and how they will affect exhibitions, and a cafe owner has expressed her worries about the costs that she could face in importing materials. Then there is the seafood industry, which is a major player in the Hebridean economy. The threat of post-Brexit export tariffs and border delays is causing very real concern for an industry that depends entirely on getting live shellfish to its primary export markets in France and Spain. Many crofters in my constituency ask me for the UK's plans on agricultural subsidy beyond 2020. With barely three weeks to go to Brexit, I wish that I could write back to my constituents to give them reassuring answers to all those questions about what the UK Government's plans are, but I cannot.

Last year, the Scottish Government made a series of modest proposals on immigration, which is another issue of vital importance to our economy and our society. The proposals were designed to overcome the risks posed to Scotland by our unique demographic situation. The memorable response from the UK Minister of State for Immigration, Caroline Nokes, was that she was not prepared to give the Scottish Parliament any powers that were not enjoyed by Lincolnshire County Council.

EU nationals should never have been asked to pay a fee to stay in the country that they have made their own, and it is welcome news that the UK Government has finally listened to that. However, EU nationals should not be asked to apply for the rights that they already have anyway, and we now need clarity on whether the unrealistic deadline for those applications will also be scrapped. That entire story underlines exactly why Scotland needs the power to create a fairer immigration system.

I come back to my constituency. The Western Isles is a diverse and vibrant place. European nationals have settled there and made the islands their home. They have made an immense contribution to our culture and to our economy, and the uncertainty that they have been put through by the UK Government is scandalous. Removing freedom of movement will have an adverse effect on Scotland and, in particular, on island communities.

Patrick Harvie: I do not think that Alasdair Allan is suggesting that freedom of movement is of only economic value, but will he take the opportunity to mention its wider social value? We should not simply defend freedom of movement as a tolerable burden because we get an economic benefit from it; it is liberating for human beings and is an extraordinary political achievement in its own right,

and it should be defended in the broadest terms possible.

Dr Allan: I am very happy to agree with all of that. As I have said, freedom of movement is important to our society, and I have said many times in the past—and happily say again—that Scotland's culture has benefited immensely from being open to people from other EU countries.

I will end where I began. Scotland did not vote for Brexit and we should not be dragged out of the EU against our will. Our wishes were utterly ignored before and during the 2016 referendum, and they have been utterly ignored since. Brexit is a bid for British isolationism. I look forward to the day when Scotland recalls with relief the moment that she forged her own independent path in Europe and the world.

16:34

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I want to touch on a point regarding freedom of movement, which Alasdair Allan and Patrick Harvie have just spoken about. Freedom of movement is not just about the people who come to Scotland to enrich our society and our communities; it is also about the opportunities that are offered to Scots to go to EU nations to enrich themselves and their learning, and to bring that back to Scotland when they return. It is a two-way process, and not everybody picks up on that point. I say that because I benefited from studying in Europe. I studied in France twice and in Germany and Sweden, so I know the benefits that have been afforded to me through membership of the European Union. That experience has also allowed me to help others in my community, not just as an MSP but as a friend, a colleague and a member of my party.

I welcome the co-operation between the Scottish and Welsh Governments that has meant that the two debates are taking place at the same time today. The strong message from Scotland and Wales will highlight how concerned elected members feel on behalf of our constituents and our respective nations.

I am under no illusion that, no matter what is discussed in the chamber today, the Conservatives will not relinquish their intransigent position, which is increasingly isolationist in the extreme. To be 24 days—or “sleeps”, as Alasdair Allan said—away from leaving the EU with no deal, no transition arrangements and no idea of the terms of the relationship is nothing short of a disgrace. The UK Government's calamitous approach to the Brexit discussions is laid bare for all to see. The so-called mother of all Parliaments is not just crumbling physically, but crumbling internally. The “strong and stable” slogan has long

since been dumped in the bin, and the worst tendencies of the isolationists have been on show for far too long—certainly for the past few months—as they have dragged the weakest Prime Minister in history on a road to nowhere.

The Tories want us to sign up to the Prime Minister's offer. How could any politician who represents a Scottish constituency maintain any credibility by agreeing to a deal that would put Scotland at an economic disadvantage? If the deal is passed with Scotland at an economic disadvantage to Northern Ireland, I am sure that when we start to lose inward investment to Northern Ireland, the Tories will be the first to complain and blame the Scottish Government and this Parliament, even though they will have created that competitive disadvantage for Scotland.

The UK Government's analysis shows the catastrophic impact that a no-deal Brexit would have on business and trade. It is estimated that the UK's economy will reduce by between 6.3 per cent and 9 per cent after 15 years. The worst-hit areas will be Wales, which will face an 8.1 per cent reduction; Scotland, with an 8 per cent reduction; Northern Ireland, with a 9.1 per cent reduction; and the north-east of England, with a 10.5 per cent reduction. The analysis also warns that some food prices are likely to increase and that there is a risk that consumer behaviour could exacerbate or create shortages. That is why it is imperative that article 50 be extended, in order to avoid a no-deal scenario.

The Tories do not want to prolong the process. They obviously do not realise that, if we leave on 29 March, the issues in relation to Brexit and the economy, trade, education, access to medicines and many other areas will still need to be addressed. Brexit will not end on 29 March—that is when the next phase of Brexit starts.

The EU withdrawal negotiations have proved, once and for all, that the Westminster elite and the Tory Party hold Scotland in contempt. Minister after minister has resigned or been sacked but, somehow, Chris Grayling is still in his job—what a disgraceful shambles. While more people go to food banks, the Tories give out dodgy contracts for boats that do not exist, and then they pay £33 million in hush money because of their arrogance and complete stupidity. It is estimated that Chris Grayling has cost the UK taxpayer £2.7 billion. If that had been any Scottish Government minister, the calls from the Tories for that minister to be sacked would have been off the scale.

There have also been the financial bungs to get the DUP and other politicians on side. The DUP got its £1 billion bung for the confidence and supply arrangement, and we have heard that Northern Ireland will get an additional £140 million.

There are absolutely no Barnett consequentials from those payments—I suspect that that is what is known as the union dividend.

Once again, Scotland gets shafted and is to be put back into its box. Yesterday, the UK Government announced its stronger towns fund of £1.6 billion of post-Brexit cash. There is no cash for Scotland and no cash for Wales—they have to bid for it. That is yet another union dividend. Earlier, Donald Cameron spoke about an orderly withdrawal. That's going well, isn't it, Mr Cameron?

I support the motion in the name of the First Minister. I am Scottish and I am European and I recognise that the EU is not perfect, but I also recognise the benefits that being a member of the EU brings. I want to protect the interests of Scotland, Wales and the UK as a whole, and that is why it is vital to extend article 50, hold a second referendum and reject the right-wing extremists.

16:40

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I have met some of the protagonists who worked on the withdrawal agreement document, and I believe that the efforts of the civil servants and negotiators who were involved on both sides of the Channel, who worked in earnest to find compromises on difficult subjects, should be acknowledged and commended, and not casually brushed aside because pragmatic diplomacy does not make for hyperbolic political headlines.

Trying to do something that no EU member has done in the 40 years since Britain joined the European Common Market has been not just difficult, but divisive. We cannot ignore the fact that the deal that was agreed with the EU27 has raised many political questions. There have been questions about the backstop: whether it was ever required and how temporary, or otherwise, it could be. There have been questions about the nature of Northern Ireland's relationship with the EU and, of course, valid questions about what our future relationship with Europe might look like. The First Minister says that we should reject the deal, but the sad truth is that the deal was rejected by many people long before it was ever published or read.

For a moment, let us think about the purpose of a withdrawal agreement. Its purposes were fourfold. The first was to agree a financial settlement that both parties felt was a fair reflection of the UK's existing obligations to the EU's multi-annual financial framework. Another purpose was to secure the rights of the 3 million EU citizens living in the UK, which Conservative members wanted and—I believe—every other member of the Parliament also wanted. Importantly, the agreement was to secure the

rights of the 2 million Brits who live overseas in Europe—including the many Scots who have chosen to make Europe their home. It was also to ensure that no hard border would exist on the island of Ireland. The withdrawal agreement had to find a compromise that respected the Good Friday agreement but also acknowledged that there would be a land mass of which one part was an EU member state and the other was not.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I would like to make some progress, please.

I believe that the negotiators did, and are still doing, their best to offer the required comfort that there will be no hard border, but also to ensure that we do not end up in a permanent purgatory of transition.

The withdrawal agreement did one other important thing: it ensured consistency, continuity and transition for businesses in Scotland and every other part of the UK. We knew that from day 1: the Prime Minister's Florence speech made it clear that both sides recognised that there would be a need for some form of transition. When article 50 was triggered, many businesses and business groups told politicians loudly and clearly that a two-year negotiating period, as defined in the Treaty on European Union, was simply not long enough to allow them to prepare for Brexit. They wanted and needed an extended period to help them to prepare for the new world, whatever that new world might be.

I know that, inside and outside the chamber, there are a multitude of views on what that future relationship could or should look like: the Norway model, Canada plus, Canada plus plus, the Swiss model, Turkey, the Ukraine, a customs union, the current customs union, or the full single-market access that comes with full acceptance of the four freedoms of the EU. Whatever the views on remaining or leaving, or on this model over that model, surely entering transition in 24 days must be the priority for each and every politician in the country, in order that we can secure the rights of citizens, offer business the much-needed transition and settle our financial commitments to the EU. For the life of me, I cannot think why anyone would want to oppose that.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I will, if it is very brief.

Ross Greer: I want to go back to the very important point that Jamie Greene made about the Northern Ireland backstop. Does he recognise that any backstop that the UK could unilaterally withdraw from or that is time limited would risk a

hard border, and would therefore breach the Good Friday agreement?

Jamie Greene: It is for precisely that reason that the backstop is the last resort, if no agreement between the EU and the UK can be reached. I understand why there are concerns about the backstop being a permanent transition, but there is no desire on either side of the channel for permanent transition. That is why I believe that, according to the current wording of the withdrawal agreement, the backstop will work in its current form. However, I accept that people want more comfort that we will not end up in a permanent transition.

If the withdrawal agreement that is on the table is the bad deal that so many people say it is, why does the EU27 think that it is a good one? Is there some EU-wide conspiracy to construct a deal that works for neither the EU27 nor us? I do not believe that there is.

Tom Arthur: Will the member give way on that point?

Jamie Greene: I would like to make some progress.

I do not believe that anyone in the chamber wants a no-deal scenario, and I do not believe that anyone outside the chamber really wants a no-deal scenario. On that, I agree with the First Minister. However, I point out that that is what will happen. Motions that are agreed in this chamber will not change the underlying process by which a member state leaves the EU. The unfortunate political motivations that are behind the debate simply lay bare the unchangeable truth, which is that there is no political consensus in this Parliament about Brexit. There is no evidence to suggest that a new Government or a general election would somehow magic the impossible over Europe. Who genuinely believes that there is any appetite in Europe to rip up the deal and start again? No one I have met in Brussels believes that to be the case.

We know about Labour's opportunism on the issue: Labour thinks that it is the quickest route to Downing Street for Jeremy Corbyn. I respect Labour for having that view, but Jeremy Corbyn says on one breath that he respects the referendum, but says, "Let's have another" in the next.

Neil Findlay rose—

Jamie Greene: I say to Mr Findlay that it is no wonder that Labour is plummeting towards 30 per cent support in the polls.

It is also clear not just that the SNP will not vote against the deal, but that it has no desire to vote for any deal, which the First Minister made abundantly clear in her opening speech. What

remains at the heart of the SNP's approach to Brexit is nothing but independence, with membership of one union coming second to leaving another. The EU is nothing more than a pawn in that game.

I want to talk about a second referendum, because I think that the issue is important. It seems to have been confirmed today that the official policy of every other party in this Parliament is that we should have another vote. What message does that send to the 1 million Scots, and the 17 million voters across the UK, who voted to leave? I will tell people what it says: it says, "Your vote doesn't matter." For anyone who has a problem with two-question referendums or is concerned that a 49:51 result is too close, there is a laudable and valid debate to be had, but there is nothing to suggest that the result of a second referendum would be any different from the first.

Any politician in the Scottish Parliament who stands up and says that a leave voter did so out of prejudice or far-right sentiment needs to have a serious think about their understanding of Scottish voters and 1 million of their fellow citizens. That very contempt for the Scottish electorate is the reason why so many voted to leave.

Thank goodness that there is one party in this Parliament that is willing to put a question to the people and has the decency to respect the people's decision. For that reason, I support Jackson Carlaw's amendment.

16:48

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I say before I start my speech, Presiding Officer, that if anyone is holding voters in contempt, it is the Conservatives, who are holding in contempt the 1.7 million voters in Scotland who voted to remain in the EU.

When the people of Scotland go to the polling station, they expect their will to be carried out by their elected representatives to the best of our ability. That is the very essence of our representative democracy. The people of Glasgow Cathcart voted for me to be their MSP and the people of Glasgow voted overwhelmingly—by 67 per cent—to remain in the EU, as did 62 per cent of the people of Scotland.

Westminster is said to represent the people of Scotland at UK level, but if there were any doubt about the validity of that statement, the past few months have shown us that nothing can be further from the truth, and that Scotland's voice continues to be drowned out.

It frustrates me to see Scottish Tories who campaigned to remain in the EU—Jackson

Carlaw, Miles Briggs and Adam Tomkins, to name but a few—not only performing such a sharp U-turn on their EU position, but now putting their party interests before the interests of the people whom they represent. Their Tory Government in London has completely lost control, and what they claimed to be our glorious union has now become the laughing stock of Europe. The Prime Minister seems to be more concerned about appeasing the hard-line ERG and DUP, while she is failing miserably in the much more important Brexit negotiations and in holding the country together.

Whether it is a no-deal Brexit or the Prime Minister's Brexit, the UK is facing an economic catastrophe. I have just created a new word. [*Laughter.*] The UK is facing a catastrophe, the likes of which we have never seen before. At the same time, political parties have elected members walking out, and other representatives are more concerned about self-interest or internal party politics than they are in the plight that faces the people who elected them.

The Brexit chaos at Westminster seems to be another world, but the people and businesses in my Glasgow Cathcart constituency are already suffering. There is, in my constituency, a business called Arturo's Delicatessen, which is the only Portuguese deli in Glasgow. It makes wonderful coffee and beautiful cakes. Moreover, its owner Artur employs several locals and his shop serves as a community hub for people as they go about their day. Artur Santos came to the UK from Portugal in 2006, married a UK national, opened a business in Scotland and has been a vital contributor to the local economy in my constituency—as my waistline unfortunately shows.

Members: Hear, hear.

James Dornan: That is probably the only time the whole chamber has agreed with me since I was elected in 2007.

I have another friend who came here 40 years ago. She worked hard, became a social worker, had a good career and has one child and three grandchildren. Her daughter is now a councillor. She has been a great benefit to the community of Glasgow and Scotland. She is the sort of person we should be trying to entice here. What happens now? As Artur does, she has to fill in a settled-status form. It is completely ridiculous that somebody who has made their life here and has benefited the community and this country is now having to prove that they are worthy of staying here.

Migration hugely benefits Scotland, so taking away free movement will impact not only individuals and families, but the country's economy and our diverse communities. It is an

absolute disgrace that EU nationals such as Artur and Marisa, who have made Scotland their home, are now being forced to apply for settled status in order to remain here. Our EU citizens should not be made to apply to the shambolic and incompetent Home Office in order to retain rights to which they are already entitled.

However, in my Glasgow Cathcart constituency, it is not only EU nationals who fear Brexit. My constituent Isabella has serious concerns about her medical supplies, some of which have short shelf-lives and come from the EU. I have heard from constituents with epilepsy who are worried about the supply of primidone, and from constituents with diabetes who are concerned about how they will get their insulin should there be no deal.

Then we come to trade. As has been pointed out by the First Minister and others, the UK Government's own analysis shows the catastrophic impact that a no-deal outcome would have on business and trade. The assessment that was published last week predicts that a no-deal Brexit could leave the UK economy 6.3 per cent to 9 per cent smaller, after 15 years, than it would otherwise have been. That should be enough for any Government to rethink its position and look for another way out—but not in the UK.

Last week, I met a local printing firm in my constituency that does most of its business abroad. It is extremely competitive, and more than holds its own against all competitors. It has invested £8 million in the firm in the past six years, but Brexit looms over it like a dark cloud. Such companies fear that further expansion might not be possible if markets are closed off, or if access is restricted, which would clearly give their competitors an advantage.

Let us also not forget about the benefits of EU funding. In the event of a no-deal scenario, the UK's departure from the EU would mean that UK organisations would be unable, after Brexit day, to access EU funding for European social fund projects. There are many areas throughout Glasgow Cathcart that have benefited over the years from European structural funding and European regional development fund funding. For example, the Greater Glasgow Community University Trust provided access to a community education degree, and benefited a number of my constituents from Castlemilk. That degree programme provided access to work paid at what was then the living wage, and provided on-the-job training and practical experience.

EU funding, future trade prospects, the supply of medicines, freedom of movement and the rights of EU nationals are all threatened. They are threatened by a shambolic Westminster Government that has shown no leadership

throughout the process. Instead, the only leadership that Scotland has witnessed is that of the First Minister and our outstanding Brexit secretary, Mike Russell. Today, thanks to their work, for the first time in 20 years the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales have debated the same motion simultaneously. That is an example of two national Governments working together in the best interests of their people—which is in stark contrast to the actions of the Tory Government at Westminster.

I could talk for another six minutes about how a no-deal Brexit would adversely affect my constituency—

Members: No!

James Dornan: It is nice to bring the Parliament together.

However, I am limited by time. I would echo many of the sentiments of my colleagues who have spoken. More so, I would echo the voices of the Scottish people, who voted to remain. They have made it absolutely clear that a no-deal Brexit would be catastrophic for Scotland culturally, socially and economically. We are, potentially, only 24 days away from a catastrophic no-deal disaster. The Prime Minister must write to the EU asking to extend the article 50 process immediately. She must also introduce legislation to enable a second referendum on EU membership, with the option to remain in the EU being on the ballot paper.

A few years ago, that well-known prophet Boris Johnson used the word “titanic” to explain how successful he thought the Brexit process was going to be. “Titanic” is certainly an appropriate word for it. However, Scotland can take another path. Soon enough, Scotland’s people will decide our own future, instead of being shackled to the sinking ship that is the UK.

16:56

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): It has been an interesting debate, and one that demonstrates that the Scottish Conservatives are in complete denial about the situation that we find ourselves in and the threat that it poses to the Scottish economy and people’s livelihoods. As James Kelly said, the situation was created by the Conservatives in the first instance, in an attempt to address their long-standing internal divisions over Europe, and it is now being perpetuated through their complete failure to put country before party.

Even if an agreement were to be reached in the coming weeks, it would be very difficult to put in place the required six acts of Parliament and 600 statutory instruments and get them agreed to before 29 March. That is why I hope and believe

that our European neighbours and partners will recognise the need for an extension of article 50 and will agree to it if such a proposal is voted through by Westminster. Although there would be difficulties involved in the EU agreeing to an extension past the European elections at the end of May, where there is a will, there is a way. I think that it would be possible to negotiate an extension that would take us beyond the European elections if that time is needed to find the best way forward. All of that means that we must and should take a no-deal Brexit off the table.

Many people I have spoken to in recent weeks say that they are fed up with the whole process and just want it to be over, but a no-deal Brexit would not be the end. It would be the start of a further period of much more complex negotiations and a period of instability that would cost jobs and increase uncertainty and, indeed, hardship for communities up and down Scotland. In today’s edition of *The Times*, Professor Jim Gallagher notes that

“Government officials here, one the world’s richest countries, have been considering whether there would ... be enough food in the shops or medicines in the hospitals”

if we were to leave with no relationship with the EU and no deal. The Conservative Government is content to spend £171,000 an hour on preparing for a dangerous and unnecessary no-deal scenario, which many economists say would be catastrophic and which has the potential to push Scotland’s economy into recession. Imagine what could be done if that £171,000 an hour were to be spent instead on education, health, housing and building our economy. Tory members should be apologising to the people of Scotland rather than opposing our taking a no-deal Brexit off the table.

Professor Gallagher is among many people who would like to see an extension of article 50 used to engage with people more widely. He argues for citizens’ assemblies—a measured, deliberative process in which ordinary citizens hear the evidence, consider the options and come to a view. He acknowledges that this could result in a second vote in the country but makes the valid point that campaigning now in a second referendum would be bitter and divisive.

Whether there is time to take on board these ideas remains to be seen, but the point that referendums do not lend themselves to informed debate and tend to create division and bitterness must surely be taken on board for the future. The key point of today’s debate is to make a clear statement that the no-deal option must be removed from the table. May’s no-deal threat is empty and hugely expensive, and it would waste billions of pounds that we should be spending on vital public services. It is a damaging attempt to

appease a faction in her own party when she needs to reach out to overcome this crisis.

Labour is ready to talk to the Government and others in Parliament about a sensible alternative plan, but not while Theresa May is wasting £171,000 an hour of taxpayers' money on dangerous and unnecessary no-deal brinkmanship. If the Prime Minister is serious about finding a solution that can command support in Parliament and bring our country together, she must listen not only to the majority of MPs and members of her own Cabinet but to the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales, which are overwhelmingly against a no-deal Brexit.

Labour will support an amendment in favour of a public vote to prevent a damaging Tory Brexit or a no-deal outcome, both of which would be damaging to our country. That is in line with our policy, which was agreed unanimously at conference last year and is a policy that we have stuck to. We will consider any back-bench amendment that is consistent with that approach. Any such amendment to support a public vote could be attached to the Prime Minister's deal, or a version of it, should it win a majority in the House of Commons.

We will also continue to push for the other available options to prevent a damaging Tory Brexit or no deal, including a close economic relationship that is based on our credible alternative plan or—as Richard Leonard said—a general election. A no-deal Brexit would be deeply damaging to Scotland's economy, and it would be damaging to people. It would be damaging to access to healthcare and to people's quality of life. That is why this Parliament should unite and demand that a no-deal Brexit be taken off the table.

17:03

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I will raise a specific matter that is causing significant concern and alarm to clinicians, patients and families in Scotland and right across the UK in relation to Brexit: Scotland's access to European reference networks—ERNs. However, I assure members that this speech will not be a dry consideration of an abstract concept; rather, it is about a real, looming threat to some of the most unwell and vulnerable constituents we represent.

I am the convener of the cross-party group on rare, genetic and undiagnosed conditions. At our 5 February meeting, our members heard some stark warnings from clinicians Professor Peter Mossey and Professor Jonathan Berg about the threat of Brexit to ERNs. It is not an abstract threat; there are some real examples of how Brexit will impact

on patients with rare, genetic and undiagnosed conditions.

ERNs connect patients, clinicians and researchers right across Europe. They allow knowledge and expertise about rare diseases to be shared across Europe, providing patients with access to diagnosis and transformative care without the burden of long-distance travel. ERNs enable researchers to engage with rare disease patients across Europe to support clinical trials, offering families hope that an effective treatment or even a cure will be developed for their rare conditions. However, at present, the UK Government and the EU have not agreed on a withdrawal procedure that would protect the UK's ability to continue to be involved in ERNs, and that is a scandal.

Without the UK's continued involvement, the capacity of the reference networks will be diminished and the networks risk falling short of their ambition to raise standards and ensure equity in rare disease care across the UK. Professor Mossey explained that clinicians in Scotland and the rest of the UK have already been informed that they will be prohibited from participating in and benefiting from data collection by ERNs from 29 March 2019—that is not just a threat; it is already happening. He explained that the potential implications of being removed from ERNs include reduced access to the best diagnostic and surgical expertise; the quality of patient care suffering, potentially resulting in patients dying; the introduction of inequalities; and the UK being unable to take advantage of research collaboration or to contribute to or benefit from innovation.

At the same meeting, Professor Berg echoed Professor Mossey's comments and explained that a large axe had fallen, meaning that no patient data will be accepted by the EU after 29 March 2019. He said that he would no longer be able to seek diagnostic expertise for his patients—for our constituents—through European reference networks, which would be damaging for UK patients.

I thank the Genetic Alliance UK for its work in the area and for the information that it has given me in preparation for the debate. At present, there are 24 thematic ERNs involving about 20,000 healthcare professionals and 300 centres of excellence right across 26 European countries. In Scotland, there are seven centres of excellence in four of our national health service boards, including my board, which is NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Those centres provide real support for patients and families with a wide range of conditions, including rare skin, lung and bone disorders.

The Specialised Healthcare Alliance, which has also been campaigning on the subject, estimates

that 150,000 UK patients are cared for through European reference networks. That is not an abstract concept—it is 150,000 patients who are being put at risk by Brexit. The protect ERNs campaign is calling on the UK Government and the EU

“to secure the sustained involvement of the UK in ERNs.”

In December 2018, the UK Government stated that, in a no-deal scenario, UK clinicians would be required to leave ERNs on 29 March, and we know that that is already happening. The Genetic Alliance UK has said:

“For too long patients and families affected by rare conditions in Scotland and across the rest of Europe have had to struggle to access a correct diagnosis, specialist knowledge, and appropriate treatment. ERNs offer a unique opportunity to transform care and treatment for patients, but only if we can maintain momentum and ensure they can utilise all the specialist knowledge”.

That is all being put at threat.

Louise James is a parent representative with SWAN—syndromes without a name—UK. Her son Scott has an undiagnosed condition and participates in the 100,000 genomes project, which is a really worthwhile pan-UK project. Louise has spoken about two other children, the first of whom is a little boy called Zach. She said:

“he is seven and currently in Bristol Children’s Hospital. His gastric issues are so rare here in the UK they are struggling to treat him and he is becoming seriously unwell. There is, however, a doctor in Italy that has researched and treated children just like little Zach, and shortly he will be travelling there for surgery. The follow up care will be done here in the UK, but using the expert knowledge from that doctor in Italy.”

Louise has also talked about a little boy called Sam. She said:

“He is three, blind and has seizures that so far medicine has failed to control. He is the only boy in the UK to be diagnosed with Grin1. However, there is a big study in Leipzig that is fast leading to potential treatments. Only by comparing that knowledge widely can we get a diagnosis and treatment for everyone. That means carrying on the good work across Europe, where these networks already in place are adding great value to the quality of life of children like my Scotty, just like Sam and little Zach, along with adults all across Europe.”

A no-deal Brexit must be taken off the table, not for the political classes but for our constituents and the patients I have talked about. Article 50 must be extended. My preference is that there is no Brexit. The only cast-iron guarantee that I can give my constituents and the families of those I have mentioned is that May’s Brexit is not fit for purpose and does not give the reassurances that we seek. I do not give a monkey’s whether it is May’s Brexit or Corbyn’s Brexit; I just want to make sure that, whether it is in Maryhill as in Madrid or in Springburn as in Stockholm, the people and families I represent get the best-quality healthcare

for the treatment of their conditions. It is a matter of life and death. Let us bin Brexit or let us make sure that a no-deal Brexit is taken off the table, and let us serve our constituents.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The last of the open debate contributions is from Stewart Stevenson.

17:10

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): In all of this there is one person for whom I have briefly felt a very small degree of sympathy, and that is Theresa May. I have a quotation from Sophocles from 2,400 years ago, which is especially for her:

“The keenest sorrow is to recognise ourselves as the sole cause of all our adversities.”

I say that because—at the outset, before getting anything in return, and in invoking article 50—she chose to give away one of the most important negotiating tools that she had at her disposal, which was time. It is the one thing that we all get equal amounts of, but when we give away time we give away the debate.

I have some other interesting quotations. I want to spend a little time talking about how fishing has been dealt with in many of the relevant documents. The First Minister referred to the American negotiating document, to which I will come back in a minute or two. In any negotiation process that ends up with a printed document, it is as well to remember what the American singer-songwriter Tom Waits said:

“the large print giveth and the small print taketh away.”

As far as the large print is concerned, fishing figured in Theresa May’s speech at the Mansion house in January 2017—there was a single mention in a very substantial speech. In essence, she said that we should deliver equity in fishing to foreign countries. There was not a single word about our fishermen in the UK, whether Scottish, English, Welsh or Irish—it was all about the foreigners. Mrs May realised her mistake and, in Florence, she said that there should be equity between our fishermen and those of other countries. In other words, she was teeing us up for her to sell out our fishermen again.

Today, we have practical problems: we are now into the small print. We will need export health certificates if we are to land fish from Scotland in other countries. How is the crew of a vessel that is fishing off Greenland to decide where it will land—decisions on whether to land in Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Scotland or England are made while the boat is at sea—when they do not have the certificate that enables them to make that

choice? Obtaining a certificate carries a cost, but it also involves a delay and so costs time, too.

Let us have a look at other small print from the American negotiating document. I will read one paragraph, which is on sanitary and phytosanitary measures:

“Include strong provisions on transparency and public consultation that require the UK”—

remember that it is the Americans who are saying this—

“to publish drafts of regulations, allow stakeholders in other countries to provide comments on those drafts, and require authorities to address significant issues raised by stakeholders and explain how the final measure achieves the stated objectives.”

In other words, other countries have to sign off the drafts. The requirement is repeated in relation to technical barriers to trade. It is quite clear that if the UK thinks that it is getting independence, it is mistaken. The last big country with which we might wish to have a trade deal has negotiating terms that tell us precisely how it wants to control how the UK operates in that regard. Of course, we have nothing much to give.

Let us also think about the role of the NHS. The American negotiating term that deals with trade in services says that the rules

“apply to all service sectors”

and that

“Discrimination against foreign services suppliers”

is not allowed. It goes on to say that the UK should

“Retain flexibility for U.S. non-conforming measures”.

In other words, the Americans are allowed non-conforming measures, but the UK must conform.

The term on “State-Owned and Controlled Enterprises”—which would include the NHS—says:

“Ensure that SOEs act in accordance with commercial considerations with respect to the purchase ... of goods and services.”

In other words, activities cannot be run without being opened up to commercial competition. That is what the Americans want.

A long-term issue between the United States and the European Union has been the privacy and use of data that is collected. Under “Financial Services”, the negotiating document refers to

“commitments to ensure that the UK refrains from imposing measures ... that restrict cross-border data flows”.

In other words, our data should be able to be lifted from the UK and taken to the regime in the United States, where personal data is not protected in the way that we are used to expecting and requiring.

The document also says that non-tariff barriers against US agricultural goods must go—in other words, we must accept chlorinated chicken and hormone-treated beef. That is all in there.

Here is another one—it is a cracker. Under “Labor”, the document says:

“Require the UK to ensure that foreign workers are protected under labor laws.”

That is not for the US—that disnae really matter; the US can keep people out for as long as it wants to.

I return to the small print that goes with the withdrawal agreement. The debate has been all about the agreement, and there has been little discussion of the political declaration. Paragraph 75 of the declaration says:

“Within the context of the overall economic partnership the Parties should establish a new fisheries agreement on, inter alia, access to waters and quota shares.”

In other words, we will not get the “sea of opportunity” that we have been promised and we will not get control over our fishing waters in our own right.

I conclude with a quote from 1862, in another age of great difficulties—the American civil war. I am reading the latest biography of Frederick Douglass, an ex-slave who, interestingly, visited Scotland in 1843. I direct the attention of our Conservative friends—I have Conservative friends—to what he wrote:

“He is the best friend of this country, who, at this tremendous crisis, dares tell his countrymen the truth”.

It is time for the Tories to start telling the truth to themselves and not to spread falsehoods about others.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. It is disappointing that not everyone who took part in the debate is present in the chamber.

17:17

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It is my great privilege to close for the Liberal Democrats. I am grateful that the Government afforded time for the debate and I give good wishes to our colleagues in Wales.

We stand together at an inflection point in the history of these islands; not since the early days of world war two have we faced an inflection point of such magnitude. When we compare those two fulcrum moments in our nation's history, the sad reality is that we realise that, in 1940, Great Britain stood alone surrounded by enemies, whereas today, we stand alone surrounded by friends. Those friends are trying desperately, with affection and concern, to coax us out of the tree into which

we have inexorably climbed. These are days of national humiliation.

It is ironic that a once-great country should be laid so low by a jingoistic elite that still hungers for such greatness but which, with every passing day, pushes it further beyond reach. Those people have brought us to the cliff edge of no deal, as if it were a lever of negotiation and a preferred destination.

Let us remember that, in part, the same elite persuaded some of the people who voted leave to do so on the basis that 80 million Turks stood ready to enter our shores on Turkey's accession to the European Union. That proposition came from a narrative arc that stoked an old fury. For 40 years, that narrative has ascribed the blame for negative social outcomes to incomers and foreigners and has mourned the loss of a country that, to be frank, never existed. That does not speak to the Britain that I still recognise, which is welcoming, tolerant and resilient.

Brexiteers and ERG members now play up that quality of resilience as a virtue in the calamity that we face. It is true that we are a resilient people: in the teeth of war and global economic depression, the people of these islands have endured. However, those times were thrust upon us; at no point in our nation's history have we imposed a state of emergency on our own citizens, as we do now.

Throughout history, Governments have made bad decisions that harm us. The normal course of things is for the population to be afforded the chance to correct such decisions at the ballot box at subsequent general elections. This time, no such opportunity has been afforded to the people of Great Britain. Therefore, on 24 June 2016, when the referendum result was known, our party was the first to call for a referendum on the final terms of the deal. I am grateful to those parties who have joined us in that call and for their members' solidarity.

The focus on resilience has led Brexiteers such as Liam Fox to move on from saying that a no deal is "preferable" to no Brexit to saying that a no deal is now "survivable". The cold reality is that Brexit without a deal might not be survivable for all the people whom we represent. Indeed, I am sure that I am not alone in finding panic in the letters in my postbag from constituents who rely on life-saving medicines that have a short shelf-life, have to be taken in a time-sensitive manner and are produced on the continent. They have deep concerns. Their conditions, which include epilepsy, diabetes and HIV, could prove fatal should those resources dry up.

The first duty of any Government should be to offer comfort to our most vulnerable citizens and to

protect them from harm. This UK Government has singularly failed in that regard. When the United Kingdom's health secretary, Matt Hancock, boasts that the UK is now

"the largest buyer of fridges in the world",

he diminishes himself, the office that he holds and the entire country.

It is not just patients who are affected. We have heard a lot about the NFU and why we should back the deal. However, the NFU points to the surge in the numbers reported to it of farmers on what the NFU calls suicide watch because of their anxiety about the products that they will be unable to sell in the event of a no-deal Brexit. We know all about the fruit pickers who are integral to the just-in-time economy, but sheep farmers will lose £30 a lamb in the event of a no-deal Brexit, never mind the difficulties that they might have in exporting to the continent.

The biggest threat is to peace on the island of Ireland. There being no deal would drive a coach and horses through the Good Friday agreement. It would very possibly lead that island—and potentially the mainland—into a state of civil war.

No form of Brexit is less harmful; no form of Brexit does not cause harm. For all those reasons, my party has articulated the basic necessity that, in the cold light of dawn, now that the reality of the departure from the EU is known, we should credit the British people with maturity and ask them, in the solemnity of the polling stations where this all first started, "Is this really what you meant?" If it is not, they should have the right to return us to membership of the European Union.

We have heard of the deficiency in unicorns that exists at Westminster; there is also a deficiency in no-deal planning. The sum total of our preparation has been laid out in the debate: an out-of-court settlement to Eurostar, a ferry company that has never floated a boat in its existence and a pile of fridges so big that it would embarrass a Magnet showroom. These are days of humiliation for this country.

On the threat of no deal, I say to ERG members and hard Brexiteers—some of whom may sit on the benches to my left—that they have promised to take back control, but we have no control in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. With their threat of no deal, they are holding a gun to nobody's head but our own and those of the constituents whom we represent. They have sought to restore these islands to greatness, but that greatness lies in ruins. It is high time that they recognise that the emperor of no deal, which they and their colleagues have created, is not just underdressed but stark bollock naked.

Members: Oh!

Alex Cole-Hamilton: There is no promised land; there is no land of milk and honey. For those reasons, the Liberal Democrats will support the Government's motion tonight.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I urge Alex Cole-Hamilton to watch his language in the chamber and to use terms that are more respectful.

17:25

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): There are moments when we can be proud of broad agreement across Parliament. Often, those moments of unity see us rally round a progressive cause or statement of values. Today, between here and the Welsh Assembly, five parties are doing that. Members have made statements in support of a broad internationalism, of a progressive and outward-looking society, and of the incredible achievements in peace and freedom that we have played our part in as a participant in the European project.

However, fundamentally, what we are united in today is a damage-limitation exercise—a defensive action against the single most self-destructive political act in our post-war history. It saddens me profoundly. I was not elected to this Parliament to spend my time here on damage limitation—especially when that damage comes from something that Scotland voted overwhelmingly against.

As Tom Arthur did, I visited a school yesterday. A 17-year-old Polish student there said to me simply, "I hope I get to stay." What a profoundly distressing thing for him even to have to contemplate. What a profoundly depressing state the UK Government has taken us to, where that young man is worried about being thrown into the cruelty of the immigration system that the UK Government already runs for citizens of countries that are outwith the European Union.

The scale of the chaos, incompetence and instability that are playing out at Westminster has now been going on for so long that there is a danger of its being normalised, but it is not normal. As the First Minister said, this is a developed nation in peacetime, so why have the Tories brought us to the point at which we are stockpiling medicines and fuel? Why are they unable to choose between preservation of the Northern Ireland peace process and satisfying the obsession of extremists on their Westminster back benches? Why is a cabinet minister who is responsible for more than £2 billion-worth of screw-ups—who gave a ferry contract to a company that has no ferries, for example—still in office? The answer to that last one is simple: Chris Grayling voted to leave. It is another example of

what Patrick Harvie referred to: the Prime Minister putting Tory party interests ahead of having basic competence at the highest levels of the British Government. The Prime Minister's strategy of running down the clock and playing chicken with her back benchers is reckless and irresponsible. It is certainly not statesmanship.

It is hard to explain to the public why a no-deal Brexit would be catastrophic. The warnings sound unrealistic when we talk about them, but we have a responsibility to try, because the threat is real. We must tell the public what will happen to supplies of food, fuel and basic goods, and what will happen to jobs, rights and funding for everything from youth clubs to agriculture. The threat to medicines is particularly profound, especially for people who rely on repeat prescriptions, such as James Dornan's constituents and the people whom Bob Doris mentioned. There are people whose lives depend on daily or frequent medication for epilepsy, diabetes, asthma and more. Any shortages of medicines could be fatal, as the English health secretary has apparently laid bare to the UK Cabinet. Ministers have been warned about it.

Alex Cole-Hamilton was absolutely right to say that it is a "national humiliation" that we have a UK health secretary who is bragging that the UK is now the world's largest purchaser of fridges because we need them to store our stockpiled medicines. We should not need to say this, but apparently we must: medication saves lives, so nothing that puts access to it at risk should be tolerated. However, for the Prime Minister it is a risk that is worth taking, and for some Tory MPs it is the outcome that they want.

I know that the Scottish Government has published some guidance on no-deal preparations, and I appreciate that. However, the page on medicines and the NHS is not reassuring. As it stands, the Government is simply warning that there might be shortages, but the page does not provide advice on what to do if there are shortages, or what people should be doing to prepare. I appreciate that the Scottish Government did not cause this crisis, but it must ensure that the public are adequately prepared to the greatest possible extent.

Willie Rennie was absolutely correct to say that there is no Brexit outcome that would see us being better off. That is something that I am sure we will all remember when the born-again Brexiteers on the Tory front bench next attempt to lecture the rest of us on what is best for Scotland's economy.

Again, we should be clear what a no-deal scenario would mean for the economy. The Scottish Government's projections show that we would face a drop of up to 7 per cent in our GDP by the end of this year. That is breathtaking.

However, for most people, that is an abstract figure. What it means in reality is up to 100,000 lost jobs. For the people who are fortunate enough still to have one, the value of their wages will plunge. Everyday items will become more expensive, if they are available on the shelves at all. Sometimes, I just cannot tell which of the Tories do not grasp that and which grasp it but do not care.

The pitiful stronger towns fund for England shows such ignorance and contempt. The headline figure of £1.6 billion quickly falls apart. It is already suspiciously low—far lower than what is provided through European funding—and it gets worse when we discover that the money is to be spread across seven years. If—this is a big “if”, given that the Tories have not bothered clarifying the matter—the Barnett formula were applied to the fund, Scotland would receive about £26 million a year. Let me put that in perspective. When the Greens got the threshold for the higher rate of income tax frozen in the first budget that we negotiated in this session, the measure raised more annually than the most that the stronger towns fund might deliver for Scotland. A minor concession that we secured in one budget is worth more to Scotland than the Westminster Government’s flagship Brexit fund.

However, the Brexit bribe fund shows how we got here. Communities that were abandoned by the state and have been devastated by austerity were won over by leave campaigners promising a change and a Brexit dividend. They put on the side of a bus a claim that they knew there was no chance would be fulfilled—certainly not with the likes of them in Government.

The damage that Brexit will do to such communities goes far beyond what that pitiful pot of bungs offers. I commend the Labour MPs who have already rejected it—the very Labour MPs at whom it is aimed. If anything, the Brexit bribe has made the Prime Minister’s task more difficult. It has further alienated those Labour MPs and it has also alienated Tory MPs to whose constituencies it will not apply.

On the communities that voted to leave, I ask Jackson Carlaw, who accused others of being elitists who believe that 17 million people were duped, whether the Conservative Party no longer cares about the rule of law. The leave campaign broke the law. It acted illegally: it breached spending limits and stole data. More serious investigations into its funding are going on. If the referendum had been binding, rather than advisory, it would have been struck down on that basis. I cannot imagine that Mr Carlaw would have been so prosaic had the yes campaign been found to have broken the law—but Tory hypocrisy is nothing new.

We know what the choices are now: a terrible deal that has already been rejected by MPs, the disaster of there being no deal, or revocation of article 50 to end this sorry process and remain. It looks like MPs are unable to make that choice, so the solution for them is clear: they should vote for an extension to the process and hand the choice back to the people. Now that the people have seen the lies of the leave campaign collapse under the weight of reality, they deserve a chance to give their verdict.

The Presiding Officer: I urge Mr Greer, as I did Mr Cole-Hamilton, to be careful about his use of language and to be as respectful as possible to all members.

17:32

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): There are just 24 days until the UK is scheduled to leave the EU. There are 24 days to go, and the country remains in limbo. Businesses are unclear on the regulations with which they will have to comply, exporters are in the dark about transport arrangements and customs procedures, workers and EU citizens are unsure about their futures and rights, no one is sure about data sharing and banking arrangements, and there is a lack of clarity about the operation of our borders, especially in Northern Ireland. The list goes on and on and on.

It is outrageous that we are at this stage in March, and that we are still uncertain about how—or, indeed, whether—we will leave the EU on 29 March. Richard Leonard, Willie Rennie, Patrick Harvie, the First Minister and many other members were right to say that the situation is not only a damning indictment of the chaotic Administration that the Tories are running, but is a serious threat to the livelihoods of thousands of people across the communities of Scotland and the UK.

Of course, it will not be Jackson Carlaw, Adam Tomkins or Boris Johnson who suffer the consequences. Oh no: for the privileged few, things will carry on as they were. We saw that when Jacob Rees-Mogg, of all people, with all the brass neck that has been bred into him, moved his business interests to Dublin. It will be the people who always suffer who feel it most—the working people of this country who toil every day to keep our economy moving and whose taxes pay for public services.

The business owner who sells into the EU still does not know what regime and tariffs, if any, will apply, or what bureaucracy and paperwork will be needed. They still do not know whether, at the end of this month, they will be left working under WTO rules, with all that that means. WTO rules are

about much more than tariffs and trade; they are about energy transfer, food safety, agriculture and manufacturing, and they are about jobs, jobs and jobs again.

It has been two and half years since Cameron and Osborne pulled their tactical masterstroke, which spectacularly backfired, and two years since Theresa May called an election that was equally successful. We have had Jamie Greene accusing Labour of “opportunism” for calling for a general election. I ask Mr Greene: was it opportunism when Theresa May tried to exploit the situation in a general election that blew up right in her face?

With less than a month to go, we are no clearer on the way forward, with the UK Parliament in deadlock. We are told that no-deal Brexit has to stay on the table as a negotiating strategy. I ask the Tories across the chamber: how would they assess the success of that strategy when they see Honda leaving Swindon, Nissan refusing to make their new model in Sunderland and businesses in Scotland fearing for their future and workers for their jobs, which Daniel Johnson described so well? Does Mr Carlaw still believe that that is all part of a clever strategy? Is it a cunning plan? If it is, it could easily have been drawn up by Baldrick.

The Government is preparing for food shortages, stockpiling medicines and commissioning lorry parks. Social care providers are on the edge of a staffing crisis, taxpayers are shedding £33 million for emergency ferry services that never existed, there are rising tensions in Northern Ireland after decades of painstaking work to bring peace, and there exists the potential for a huge increase in mass unemployment. Is all that a price that is worth paying for a Tory no deal?

The reality is that all that and all the people who are affected are viewed merely as collateral damage in the Tory civil war over Brexit. Let no one be under any illusions: we are in this mess because of the Conservative Party. The referendum was conceived and executed by it, and its representatives in Scotland have stood aside and applauded Theresa May’s every move, while she has become hidebound by the Brexiteers and the DUP, and is offering crumbs to MPs in northern and midlands seats, and even trying to woo the trade union leaders whom her party has, for all its time, vilified.

Time and again, I have watched in this Parliament Adam Tomkins and Jackson Carlaw defend the Prime Minister’s farcical moves that have put this country on a trajectory that could wreck our economy and so much more. I have not heard Mr Tomkins speak yet today, but all the way through this, I have not believed that he believes a word of it. I wonder whether he will take this opportunity to say that enough is enough and call on the Prime Minister to rule out no deal and her

bad deal, which was rejected by the House of Commons in a record defeat, or will he put his subservient loyalty to his latest political party ahead of his constituents’ jobs?

It is obvious what this is really about; it is about the 40-year civil war in the Tory Party over Europe that has dominated the politics of the UK for far too long. Jacob Rees-Mogg and Boris Johnson are the true heirs to Enoch Powell and Norman Tebbit. I say this: put an end to that war and get on with securing a deal that will deliver a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union, in order to ensure that there are no tariffs with Europe and to avoid the need for a hard border in Northern Ireland.

Regardless of whether people voted to leave or to remain, they did not vote for this, and they certainly did not vote to see themselves and their communities being impoverished. Today, this Parliament has the opportunity to unite with our friends in the Welsh Assembly and to send a message to the Prime Minister: take no deal off the table, extend article 50 and drop the deal that was previously so comprehensively rejected by the UK Parliament, and today by this Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

17:39

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): The withdrawal agreement delivers on what business wants, on the UK’s priorities, on the EU’s priorities and even on what the SNP demanded. Business said that it wanted legal certainty and an orderly Brexit, and the withdrawal agreement delivers on that by providing legal certainty on trade, goods, customs, excise duty, intellectual property rights, data sharing, public procurement and police and judicial co-operation. All of that is jeopardised by those who do not back the deal.

Going into the withdrawal negotiations, the UK’s priorities were that the common travel area with Ireland should be maintained, that the United Kingdom should regain control of EU immigration, that citizens’ and workers’ rights should be protected and that, going forward, we would have the closest trading relationship with the European Union of any non-member state country in the world. The withdrawal agreement delivers on all those priorities.

The SNP demanded four things of the withdrawal agreement. Mike Russell called for a transition period; the deal provides it. Nicola Sturgeon called for a guarantee on EU citizens’ rights; the deal provides it. Nicola Sturgeon criticised a “blindfold Brexit”; the deal ensures that that will not happen. Mike Russell called for no hard border on the island of Ireland; the deal ensures that that will not happen. What the SNP

demanding has been granted in this withdrawal agreement, and still its members are minded to vote against it.

The First Minister: I know that this is deeply embarrassing for Adam Tomkins, because he does not believe a word that he is saying, but let me take it at face value. He talks as though only the SNP opposed the Prime Minister's deal. If the deal is so perfect—if it is the triumph that Jackson Carlaw talked about—why do most Conservatives not support the deal either?

Adam Tomkins: I support the deal and think that we should all support it. The First Minister set out her stall this afternoon by saying that we should take no deal off the table, and the way to deliver that is by backing the deal.

SNP members talk of how they have compromised, but the reality is that, two years ago, they boxed themselves in with their own red lines and they have had their fingers in their ears ever since. Insisting that we remained in the EU single market and customs union would mean that, in reality, we would not be leaving the EU at all.

The First Minister: Will the member take another intervention?

Adam Tomkins: I have already given way to the First Minister once.

We cannot take back control of our borders if we stay in the single market, and we cannot take advantage of Brexit and develop our own independent trade policy if we stay in the EU customs union.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Will Adam Tomkins give way to me?

Adam Tomkins: Let me finish the point.

Most of all, the SNP cannot seriously demand a place at the UK's negotiating table if, at the same time, it is plotting to break up the UK.

John Swinney: I would like Mr Tomkins to clarify one point that he has just made. He has attacked the First Minister for believing that it would be good to maintain our membership of the single market. In the aftermath of the referendum, why was that Ruth Davidson's position?

Adam Tomkins: The position of all Conservatives is that we must obey the verdict of the British people, that we should deliver on the referendum result that the British people voted for in a fair and lawful referendum and that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. However, as we have heard over and over again this afternoon—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Adam Tomkins: For the SNP, independence transcends everything. For the SNP, Brexit is simply an opportunity to be weaponised in the nationalists' endless pursuit of independence at any cost.

I have, many times, made plain my opposition to a no-deal Brexit. The way in which to avoid a no-deal Brexit is not to delay Brexit but to back the deal. Even after all this time, the withdrawal agreement that the Prime Minister's team negotiated on behalf of the United Kingdom is the only deal on the table. Of course, if necessary, it can be tweaked, clarified and added to with a new, legally binding codicil. However, there is no evidence that the withdrawal agreement can be replaced. After three years, no credible, alternative plan is anywhere near the table. If we want to avoid a no-deal Brexit, we must back the deal. That is what business wants, it is what Scottish farming wants, it is what fishing wants and, overwhelmingly, it is what voters want.

What have we learned about the parties' positions this afternoon? The Lib Dems have proved, yet again, that their commitment to democracy is as threadbare as that of the EU. When Denmark rejected the Maastricht treaty, the EU said, "You've got it wrong, so vote again." When Ireland rejected the Nice treaty, the EU said, "You've got it wrong, so vote again." Now that the UK has rejected the European Union, the Lib Dems have nothing to say but, "You've got it wrong. Vote again." All the Conservative MSPs believe that referendum results must be respected and that it is our duty, as elected politicians, to deliver on what the people have voted for. The British people voted to leave the EU.

What have we learned from Labour this afternoon? We have learned, yet again, not only that Labour has no plan for Brexit but that it does not even know whether it wants Brexit at all. Labour would rather get into bed with the SNP than support what the people of the UK clearly voted for in 2016. The withdrawal agreement protects workers' rights, but Labour MPs are still planning to vote against it. When Labour members are asked whether they want a general election or a second referendum, or whether they are for Brexit to be delivered, delayed or even abandoned, we get nothing but confusion from them.

The SNP has proved once again that it is addicted to referendums—and to losing them. It has proved that it is hell-bent on voting against a withdrawal agreement despite the fact that the agreement delivers what it demanded. It has proved that it wants as disorderly a Brexit as possible in order to pursue its pet project of independence and, of course, that it is committed

to dragging Scotland back into the EU's hated common fisheries policy against Scotland's will.

There is an alternative that respects the results of constitutional referendums, that supports leaving the European Union with a deal and that says that there should be no delay to the article 50 process and—most of all—no reversal of Brexit.

I support the amendment in Jackson Carlaw's name.

17:46

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): We now know that the Scottish Conservatives will be fighting the next election under the slogan "Obey Mrs May". That may not do them much good, but it is the only thing that works for them. I look forward to seeing that slogan on endless posters, perhaps with a picture of a Dalek. That would go down particularly well.

The bulk of the debate has been a very useful contribution from the Scottish Parliament, and there has been a very useful contribution from the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff. Its debate is just coming to an end, as well. I am glad to say that, this afternoon, Mark Drakeford sent me a message that he wanted me to use at the start of my contribution. I shall do so. He said:

"We have seen many remarkable days in the last three months, but today is another one. It is the first time in the 20 year history of devolution that two Parliaments—ours and yours—are simultaneously debating the same motion.

This is a sign of the seriousness of the threat which faces Wales, Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom. The threat of a no deal outcome after nearly two years of painful and—on the UK side—incompetent negotiations. We must together send an unequivocal message that this threat can and must be averted."

As the Parliament and the Assembly have been debating that unprecedented threat to them, there has been the leak of a letter in Northern Ireland from David Sterling, the head of the Northern Irish civil service, who has warned the parties in Northern Ireland of "grave" consequences that could have a "long-lasting" effect on society in the Province.

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, there is an acute sense of the pending disaster that is Brexit, and members have reflected on that in the debate. There have been many good contributions, but I want to mention that of Jenny Gilruth, who reminded us of Edwin Morgan's poem from 2004, and Daniel Johnson's passionate defence of Europe. Like him, I am motivated by a strong pro-European sense. I identify as a European, as he does. He brought that to the chamber. Alasdair Allan gave a customarily original speech. I also want to mention the

contributions of Keith Brown and Bob Doris, who referred to the European reference networks. I have met representatives of those networks, and they are very worried about the effect on rare disease research and co-ordination right across Europe. I know that my friend the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has written to the UK Government about that particular issue.

I do not often quote Neil Findlay with approval, but I will do so today. He made the point very effectively to Jackson Carlaw and his colleagues. I will paraphrase what he said: what will happen with Brexit is what often happens—the rich will take the profit and the poor will take the blame. Jackson Carlaw will not be queuing up for medicines; it will be our constituents.

This afternoon, we heard—certainly from one party—a most extraordinary defence of the indefensible, and I will spend a little bit of time examining why. I find it hard to understand the position of the Scottish Conservatives. When they look at the evidence around them, what do they think is actually happening? Businesses large and small are saying that Brexit is a disaster. This very afternoon, Willie Walsh, the head of British Airways, said that the way in which the UK Government has behaved on Brexit has been "shocking".

EU nationals are in distress. Jackson Carlaw mentioned Mrs Macdonald, but an endless number of people who are in real distress about this situation come to my surgeries. We heard similar accounts from Jenny Gilruth and others. We know of UK citizens living in other countries who are in equal distress.

We know that medicines are being stockpiled and that there are threats to food supplies. As the First Minister said in her opening speech, preparations are being made that are unprecedented in peacetime.

We know, as Alex Cole-Hamilton said, that the UK Government is an international laughing stock. Indeed, *The New York Times*, reflecting on Chris Grayling, said that he even exceeded the norm in what it described as "a golden age" of ministerial incompetence—that is a leading American newspaper commenting on the Conservatives in Government.

We know that the economic projections are all bad. We know that the House of Commons is paralysed and that the Conservative Party is deeply split. We know that there is unprecedented co-operation between the Parliaments of these islands and even between the parties in this chamber. Again and again, the Conservatives are isolated.

We know that the EU27 are refusing to budge on the withdrawal agreement—that is obvious.

When the Attorney General arrived in Brussels this afternoon, he said, “there’s always hope”. That is not much of a negotiating stance, is it?

We need only to have the evidence from our own eyes to know that the Scottish Conservative members are deeply uncomfortable. They are trying to justify the unjustifiable. We heard all those fine words about democracy, but they are not trying to preserve democracy; they are trying to preserve their party.

Donald Cameron upbraided me for quoting Burke and claimed that, in quoting Burke during a previous debate, I rejected the people’s vote and its result. I suggest that Mr Cameron might want to go back and read Burke. He probably reads him more often than I do, because Burke was a leading conservative theorist—indeed, the latest book on his political thought comes from a Tory minister, Jesse Norman.

Burke always argued that representatives are more than ciphers. I thought that that was a Tory position, until the Tories got hung up on the Brexit referendum. In 1774, when Burke wrote his letter to the electors of Bristol—which contained the quote that Mr Cameron objected to—he was about to become their MP. In 1779, five years later, Burke was about to stop being their MP, but he continued to reflect on his duty. In his final letter to the electors in Bristol, he said that a representative

“is in parliament to support his opinion of the public good, and does not form his opinion in order to get into parliament, or to continue in it.”

The latter is what we have seen with the Conservatives. They backed a referendum because they want to stay in power in London, no matter the cost.

Why are the Scottish Conservatives defending the indefensible? From what I have seen over the past few years, I suggest that there are three things that the Scottish Conservatives are trying to avoid. The first thing is their own powerlessness. Just as the Prime Minister and her cabinet have no respect for this chamber, they have no respect for the Scottish Conservatives. The Scottish Conservatives do not reckon in the annals of conservatism elsewhere, but they do not want to recognise that, so they shout all the louder for Brexit.

The situation also makes them confront an uncomfortable truth about what has happened in devolution. What has happened in Scotland and in Wales is a divergence. There has been a political divergence between the way in which Scotland and Wales operate and govern and what is happening in the complete mess at Westminster. They do not want to confront that, because many of them still aspire to go to Westminster—we have seen them come and go here. They are elected

into the Scottish Parliament and the noblest prospect that they see is to go somewhere else. They do not want to confront that. [*Interruption.*] I notice a number of them shouting that that is not the case. They are the ones—

Members: Alex Salmond!

Michael Russell: They can shout as much as they want—they are the ones who have not been selected to go elsewhere.

The third thing that the Scottish Conservatives have to confront is their own divisions. There are sensible, moderate Conservatives on those benches; there are one or two who know how ridiculous the position that they have found themselves in is. They know that they are defending the indefensible. That is why they indulge in the displacement activity that we have seen this afternoon: they blame the SNP and attempt to smear others, in order to hide their own tensions. In a very real sense, Brexit has brought out the absolute worst in the Scottish Conservatives. We can see it on the Conservative benches. The more that they grin and the more that they shake their heads, the more they realise that the situation is terminal for them, unless they wake up to their obligations to Scotland. Mr Chapman goes on grinning and he will continue to grin until he is defeated, which will not be far off, I am glad to say. [*Interruption.*]

Let me bring the debate to a conclusion by leaving the Tories to their own misery. Let us stand back and look at what has actually taken place today. I hope that, in the next 10 minutes, members in the chamber will be very clear about what is unacceptable. First, a no-deal scenario is unacceptable and must come off the table—that is what Wales will say and that is what Scotland will say. Secondly, the Scottish Parliament will say that Prime Minister’s deal is utterly unacceptable, which it is. It is another catastrophe and we do not wish it—that is what we will say and that is what Wales will say. We will then go further: we will say that the time has come for people to choose and the time has come to overcome the selfish narrowness of the Scottish Conservatives and their masters south of the border. The time has come to say to the people of this country, “What do you want? Do you really want to continue with this farce and nonsense?” The better Tories know that that is what it is. Do people want to continue with this or do they want to go back and consider again the way in which we should, as a country, go forward?

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Russell: I am sorry, Mr Scott—I do not have time. You are one of the ones whom I respect on this, and I do not want you to

embarrass yourself, because you do not have to. You do not have to stand up for what the Tories now are—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Michael Russell: You could find a better way forward.

This has been a useful debate. If it does nothing else, it will send a message. The message is this: the Scottish Conservatives are not representing Scotland. They are representing the Conservatives and, in Scotland, that is a one-way ticket to oblivion.

Point of Order

17:59

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 1 February, I lodged a parliamentary question regarding the future of the air discount scheme, following an earlier response that I had received that suggested an announcement would be made “in due course”. I asked the Scottish Government:

“in light of the current scheme ceasing on 1 April 2019, whether it will confirm by what date the announcement will be made.”

A further reply from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity was received on Friday last week. It stated:

“The Scottish Government ... will make a formal announcement before the current scheme ends.”—[*Written Answers*, 1 March 2019; S5W-21378]

Today, a mere two working days later, the Scottish Government made such a full announcement on the air discount scheme.

Paragraph 3.5 in the Scottish ministerial code states:

“When the Parliament is meeting, Ministers should ensure that important announcements of Government policy are made, in the first instance, to the Parliament”.

It is hard to see what possible justification there could be for a minister to wait a month before giving Parliament a non-answer to a written question on Friday, only for the substantive announcement to be made to the media two working days later. Surely the appropriate action for the minister to take would be to provide a holding reply on Friday and a substantive response today.

Presiding Officer, can you advise on how ministers might avoid such a discourtesy to Parliament in future? Indeed, what is the point now of lodging a parliamentary question in the first place?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank the member for advance notice of his point of order, on which I can advise. While I am not responsible for the operation of the ministerial code, I note that, in making that announcement, the Scottish Government did not follow one of the methods set out in the good practice guidance on announcements. Those methods include ministerial statements, as well as Government-inspired questions—or GIQs—as they are now known. That guidance exists to ensure that announcements by the Government on matters of importance do not enter the public domain before being communicated to Parliament. That underlines the point that ministers are accountable

to Parliament and that Parliament should be able to hold ministers to account. It also ensures transparency in proceedings.

I appreciate that some judgment is required about whether an announcement should be made using one of those methods and, if so, which method should be used. However, it is clear that the member has shown an interest in this matter, and his written PQ offered the opportunity for the announcement to be made to Parliament. I am also sure that other members would be interested in this matter. I therefore invite the Government to reflect on that point and to give some consideration to how it will inform Parliament of policy matters in future.

Decision Time

18:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-16107.1, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, which seeks to amend motion S5M-16107, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on European Union withdrawal negotiations, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)

Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S5M-16107, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on EU withdrawal negotiations, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 87, Against 29, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament reiterates its opposition to the damaging EU exit deal agreed by the UK Government; agrees that a no deal outcome to the current negotiations on EU withdrawal would be completely unacceptable on 29 March 2019 or at any time; calls on the UK Government to take immediate steps to prevent the UK leaving the EU without a deal, and agrees that the Article 50 process should be extended so that agreement can be reached on the best way forward to protect the interests of Scotland, Wales and the UK as a whole.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will take a few moments before the next item of business to allow members and ministers to change seats.

Mesh Implant Removal

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15475, in the name of Neil Findlay, on Scottish Government declines help of mesh expert. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with much disappointment reports that the Scottish Government has declined an invitation from the St Louis-based obstetrician-gynaecologist, Dr Dionysios Veronikis, to travel to Scotland to help safely remove transvaginal and other mesh implants from people in Lothian and across the country who are experiencing life-changing pain and disability and to train other surgeons how to do this safely; understands that Dr Veronikis has developed specialist skills and instruments that allow entire mesh implants to be removed with positive results; believes that full mesh removal is currently unavailable in Scotland, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government to reconsider this invitation and to do all that it can to help facilitate the offer that Dr Veronikis has made.

18:06

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I thank all members who signed the motion and allowed it to be debated, and my staff for their assistance with the event today.

For the past seven years, I have been campaigning alongside women who have been victims of the debilitating impact of mesh implants—women who have seen their careers end and their relationships break down, who have lost their ability to walk, who are forced to use wheelchairs, who have lost organs and who live in constant, chronic pain that affects every aspect of their lives. Some of those remarkable women are in the gallery tonight, and I salute their determination to be here today. [*Applause.*] All through the campaign, they have acted in the interests of others. They have tried to get mesh banned so that no other woman would suffer as they have suffered. There was no real hope, however, of any improvement for them—but there is now, and they are rightly calling for action.

Many of those women have asked their general practitioner or their consultant for help. When they do, they can be referred to consultant urogynaecologists based in Glasgow and Edinburgh at what have been described as Scotland's mesh "centres of excellence". Those centres, however, are often staffed by the very surgeons who implanted the mesh in the first place and who may be subject to litigation by the same patient. Therefore, they will not operate.

Women who are accepted for remedial surgery want and expect full mesh removal, and many

have been told that that is what they will get. However, the reality is that, despite today's press release from the Scottish Government, full mesh removal is not available in Scotland. Instead, mesh that is accessible to the surgeon when they operate is removed, with the rest left inside the body. I repeat to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport that full mesh removal is not available in Scotland.

Unlike in the rest of the United Kingdom, surgeons in Scotland favoured the type of mesh implant that has caused the most crippling of injuries because of where it was placed and the fact that it is so much bigger.

In the United States, Dr Dionysios Veronikis has developed new techniques and specialist medical instruments that allow him to carry out successful full mesh removal. His pioneering methods, developed over a decade, mean that the entire mesh implant is removed carefully and in one piece. He then photographs the mesh and measures it to ensure that it corresponds with the medical record of what was put in. He does that so that he can confirm by photograph that the entire piece has been removed.

Previously, the Scottish national health service sent patients to see Dr Elneil at the University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Dr Elneil carries out full mesh removal, but her list is closed and she has a huge backlog. Right now, we have a small window of opportunity to act—an opportunity that, if we do not take it, will be lost. That opportunity is the genuine offer from Dr Veronikis to come to Scotland to work up to six days a week to carry out full mesh removal procedures, and, critically, to train Scottish surgeons in his techniques. That is a serious and genuine offer that I urge the cabinet secretary to take up.

In correspondence with me, the cabinet secretary has rightly said that Dr Veronikis must be "of appropriate professional standing" and

"recognised by the General Medical Council".

I am sure that none of us would disagree with that sentiment. It can be done. Dr Veronikis is a leading international expert in his field. Many surgeons want to learn from him, including Christopher Harding, who is one of the chairs of the British Association of Urological Surgeons and one of the UK's top specialists.

Dr Veronikis has specialised in obstetrics and gynaecology since 2000 and female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery since 2013. He was awarded the distinguished surgeon award by the US Society of Gynecologic Surgeons in 2018 and he has a hugely impressive CV. He could quickly be registered as what the GMC calls a "visiting eminent specialist", which would mean

that he could complete the GMC registration process. Therefore, registration is not a barrier to his coming here.

The national health service would then need to cover his costs and provide an operating theatre for him to work in. It is my opinion that that could be financed by using some of the additional £27 million that the cabinet secretary recently allocated to waiting times reduction; after all, mesh survivors have been waiting not weeks but years for such treatment. These are exceptional circumstances that require an exceptional response.

If members are wondering what such an action would deliver, they need look no further than the Parliament's public gallery, because Dr Mary McLaughlin, a law lecturer from Ireland, is here. She has flown over because she wanted to be here to prove the impact of the full mesh removal that Dr Veronikis carries out. On 14 January, she paid £15,000 out of her own savings to go to the US for surgery. She had all 28cm of the mesh that had been implanted removed from her body. Within a few days, she had much more mobility and, within a few weeks, she was walking again. Today, she is so free of pain and suffering that she has travelled to Edinburgh as living proof of what the procedure can mean.

Let us compare that to Mary's previous condition: she was unable to carry on with her job and was virtually bedridden; indeed, she was in so much chronic pain that she could not even sit to enjoy Christmas dinner with her family. Just two months after her surgery with Dr Veronikis, she is well enough to travel here to be with us today. Her situation contrasts with that of Lorna Farrell, who is also in the gallery, Claire Daisley from Greenock and the many others who have ended up in even more pain and in wheelchairs following so-called full mesh removal in Scotland. They still have mesh inside them, despite being told that they would have full mesh removal. There are others who have been told that the mesh implant that they were given cannot be fully removed here. The reality is that Dr Veronikis can do it and he is offering to come to Scotland to train our surgeons in how to do it.

The decision whether to take up that offer lies with the cabinet secretary and no one else. I never beg Government ministers, but I implore the cabinet secretary to do the right thing and give these injured women the best treatment that is available. They have lost so much, and they should not have to travel to the US or elsewhere, as some are having to do. They are having to beg, borrow or steal, or to use their life savings, to buy treatment. The cabinet secretary has the opportunity to act and to change lives. She has the chance to do the right thing. The alternative is that the women we are talking about will be left living a

life of pain and misery, with careers and relationships lost, and they will face a lifetime of medical costs. I believe that, collectively, those costs would far outstrip the cost of bringing Dr Veronikis to Scotland.

These women had the meshes implanted in Scotland. The recommendation for the procedure was made in Scotland. All they ask for is the realistic opportunity to have this dreadful material removed from them in Scotland. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. I say gently to members of the public in the gallery that I understand why they are applauding but it is not permitted in the Parliament.

Many members wish to speak so I ask members to restrict their speeches to four minutes to allow us to get through everybody and to allow the cabinet secretary time to respond.

18:15

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate Neil Findlay on obtaining this members' business debate on this vital and serious issue. I think that everybody in the chamber is absolutely united around the need to make sure that the NHS in Scotland does the right thing by these women, whose lives have been so badly affected as a result of botched mesh implant procedures or botched devices—or, in some cases, both.

It is estimated that about 1,000 women are in a very bad place as a result of mesh implants, and most of them think, probably rightly, that the only way to deal with the problem is to remove the mesh. I think that a lot of clinicians agree with that. I have a constituent who has suffered for the past 10 years and has been told that she cannot have the mesh removed because no one can be sure how and where the mesh has embedded itself internally in her system.

The issue is very serious indeed. The key point is that, for many women, removal of the mesh is the last-chance saloon for them to try to recover at least some of their health. The question is how best we can address that.

Some women have had the mesh removed—partially or even entirely—in Scotland. However, it appears that the new technology and techniques pioneered by Dr Veronikis in St Louis in the United States are on a level of their own. Performance appears to be consistent, of a high quality and extremely effective. Clearly, we need to be sure that such procedures can happen for our people here in Scotland.

Dr Veronikis uses microsurgery, and an important point is that he also uses translabial ultrasound, which can locate the mesh before

surgery. In the absence of that particular type of ultrasound, mesh removal surgery is essentially being done blindly and only partially.

There are other major benefits to the new techniques and technology. The operation can be conducted through the groin in addition to the vagina; in many cases, that allows for better access to full mesh removal in one operation.

My worry is that if we do not do something in Scotland, many women will be so desperate they will end up spending their life savings and getting into debt to go to America to get the procedure done. Every avenue should be explored with their health boards, their consultants and the NHS to make sure that they can get access to the service in Scotland through Dr Veronikis.

Whether or not Dr Veronikis does procedures here, it is really important that he comes to train people in Scotland on the new techniques and technology so that, after he goes home, we have the capacity—where appropriate and where required—to continue to provide full mesh removal for women in Scotland using the new techniques.

We need to look at how we can achieve that, because we owe it to these women to try to improve their lives. In many cases, that can happen only with full mesh removal.

18:20

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank my Lothian colleague Neil Findlay for securing the debate. Once again, I commend him, Jackson Carlaw and Alex Neil for their campaign and their on-going work to deliver justice for mesh survivors. I welcome to the public gallery many of the women who, along with their families, have been affected by the mesh scandal. As a co-convenor of the Parliament's cross-party group on chronic pain, I have met many of the women who have been affected, as they have attended our meetings and shared their personal stories. We should pay tribute to each and every one of them.

The debate is a welcome opportunity to consider how the Scottish Government and our NHS should work to meet the needs of mesh survivors and, for those seeking full surgical removal, how that is being achieved in Scotland today and will be achieved in the future. When I was preparing and researching for the debate, more and more questions seemed to arise when I looked at the details of the proposals in Scotland and the availability of operations to achieve full mesh removal. TVT-O mesh implants were historically used in Scotland twice as much as anywhere else in the UK, and the issues with removal are well known and documented.

I therefore ask the cabinet secretary to confirm a number of key points in responding to the debate. How many mesh removal operations have been undertaken in NHS Scotland to date, and have those operations involved partial or full removal? In relation to a point that Neil Findlay made, how many of our health boards are putting aside funds for the surgery? In addition, how many surgeons in Scotland today can undertake full mesh removal?

Our Scottish NHS needs to build capacity now and in the future to deliver surgery to achieve full mesh removal. I fully understand and appreciate the disappointment and anger that exist among mesh victims, which have been caused by the Scottish Government's decision to decline the offer by Dr Veronikis to travel to Scotland to work with the NHS here. As Neil Findlay outlined, Dr Veronikis has developed techniques for carrying out full mesh removal, and NHS Scotland has an opportunity to learn from that work and to develop new procedures for the complex removal of mesh, which is a rapidly developing area. As Alex Neil said, in such a vital area, we cannot fall behind. We cannot—and must not—let Scottish patients be at the back of the queue for mesh removal.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the member agree that part of the issue is about rebuilding trust and confidence in the health service, as a lot of women feel very let down, and that, in carrying out the procedures, the confidence that would come from having an expert to support the system is important?

Miles Briggs: I absolutely agree. The fact that we are having this debate shows that we need to do more. We have had debates on the scandal, but we need to right the wrongs.

Neil Findlay's motion calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider the invitation and to work to facilitate the genuine and positive offer that has been made. I hope that, in closing, the cabinet secretary will respond positively to that offer.

Another important issue that has been raised with me and that has been mentioned in the debate is the need for progress on translabial ultrasound scans.

It is clear, from the on-going issues and debate, that the Scottish Government needs to develop a sustainable plan for the surgical removal of mesh implants. We also need significant improvements in the help that we provide to mesh victims and their families. I therefore hope that the cabinet secretary will genuinely rethink the offer that has been made to NHS Scotland. We must never lose sight of the fact that Scottish mesh survivors are seeking solutions to address the life-changing injuries and chronic pain that mesh implants have caused them. SNP ministers should consider

every offer of support and the extension of the hand of friendship to start the process of righting the wrongs of the mesh implant scandal.

18:24

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Neil Findlay for securing this important debate and for his tenacious campaigning alongside the courageous women who have spoken out about mesh implants, many of whom are in the public gallery today. I pay tribute to them all. I also thank my colleagues Alex Neil and Jackson Carlaw for their cross-party commitment to the issue.

I was at the press conference that was held earlier today, and I am not embarrassed to say that I was moved to tears by the women's painful and harrowing stories. I join others in pleading with the cabinet secretary to accept help from the surgeon who is offering to treat them. Scotland's mesh survivors are locked in a living nightmare, but, despite their own pain and loss, they have been campaigning for years so that other women do not suffer the same fate as a result of the use of barbaric mesh implants. Many have debilitating symptoms including chronic pain and loss of mobility. As Neil Findlay has said, today—after years of selflessly campaigning for other women—they are asking for something for themselves. There is a glimmer of hope. However, it is galling that the women have been put in the position of having to ask—or beg—for help. As one of them said earlier today, in committee room 3:

"They got these implants in Scotland, and the damage was done in Scotland, so the damage should be repaired in Scotland."

The mesh survivors have been let down time and again. They have had to become experts in their own conditions when medical advice has failed and Government interventions have been lacking. Today, one campaigner described her feelings of frustration and—even more upsetting—of having no self-worth. When her mesh symptoms were explained to a doctor, they were dismissed and she was told that she had mental health problems. Understandably, mental ill health can occur as a result of chronic pain, but it is simply cruel to blame it as being the root cause of the pain.

I am the convener of the cross-party group on women's health, and I have heard many women, including campaigners on endometriosis and lipoedema, say that they, too, have had their symptoms disregarded. If the mesh survivors have taught us anything, it is that, as a society, we must start valuing women, believing them and listening to them.

With Dr Veronikis offering to come to Scotland to treat women by completely removing mesh, the campaigners now have a real chance to see their conditions improve and to have hope for the future. Alex Neil is absolutely right in saying that the issue is not simply about Dr Veronikis coming to perform the operations: we would have to take the learning from his visit and use it to train our own staff. As we all know, the problems that are caused by mesh are not just an issue in Scotland but constitute a global scandal.

The mesh campaigners—not just those who are here tonight, but hundreds of women across Scotland—have been holding each other up. We have heard at first hand from Dr Mary McLaughlin, who has come over from Northern Ireland, about the transformative difference that the treatment can make. To Scotland's mesh survivors, her story is one of hope. Like Neil Findlay, I am not too proud to stand here and beg the cabinet secretary to use her power to make that hope a reality for those women.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to the campaigners and their families. I add my voice to Neil Findlay's and to those of other colleagues from across the chamber. The mesh survivors deserve to have the treatment. I hope that, in her closing remarks, the cabinet secretary will commit to allowing that to happen.

18:28

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I, too, thank Neil Findlay for giving us the opportunity to debate the subject. I also thank Alex Neil and Jackson Carlaw for their long-standing commitment to the issue.

I will never forget meeting the mesh survivors when they came to the Parliament in 2017. A group of women who had undergone surgery to address incontinence had found themselves requiring crutches and wheelchairs, and they were no longer able to lift their beloved grandchildren. I met a woman and her husband who spoke openly of having to deal with 24-hour-a-day incontinence. I also spoke to women who had had to resign from important jobs or who could no longer care for the people they loved. Such personal impacts and experiences, which were shared openly with politicians and others, cannot be allowed to fall on deaf ears.

Today, Irish mesh campaigner Dr Mary McLaughlin came to the Parliament to share her story. As we have heard, she was operated on by Dr Veronikis and the outcome has been transformative. As party spokespeople, parliamentarians and empathetic human beings, we need to act. When there is an increase in knowledge, experience and developments in

techniques and instrumentation to remove implants, we must use those. We cannot rely on individuals finding the money—it is a prohibitive sum for far too many—so the Scottish Government must step in and help. We can all appreciate how infuriating and frustrating it must be for women to know that there is now a potential solution and that the excruciating pain that they live with might end but to have to watch, wait and hope that, somehow, they, too, might be helped.

It is clear that there is consensus across the chamber that we must do all that we can to help women whose lives have been destroyed by implants. There is also debate about how comprehensive mesh removal in Scotland is. Neil Findlay said that women whom Dr Veronikis treats are given evidence of full mesh removal—it is measured and they see photos. Given how psychologically damaging it must be for a person to have something inside them that they want to be removed, I can see why that evidence is really important.

I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary were to confirm whether full mesh removal is available in Scotland and how much evidence those who have that procedure receive. I would also be grateful if she were to confirm that any barriers that there might be to learning from Dr Veronikis can and will be removed. In this age of global knowledge exchange, surely we must strive to learn from experts in all fields.

Mesh survivors have had to campaign too long and too hard for a ban on mesh. I have absolutely no doubt that these inspirational and brave women and their families will campaign for access to full removal, but have we not already asked far too much of them?

18:31

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank Neil Findlay for giving me the chance to raise Bobbie Dailly's case. She is a very brave woman who lives in the north of Shetland. For 20 years, she has lived with mesh inside her body. She cares for her son, who is 32 and has Down's syndrome, and she puts up with excruciating pain—Alison Johnstone rightly referred to that—every day of her life.

I cannot be the only constituency member for whom everything else is put into perspective when someone such as Bobbie comes to see me. All the stuff that we deal with as politicians is as nothing in comparison with the hell that someone who has had mesh inside them for 20 years of their life has gone through.

Bobbie is in Aberdeen this week for a magnetic resonance imaging scan and she has an appointment at a Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS

Board hospital later this month. She wants all that stuff—all of it—out of her body. When she most recently came to see me, she said that, like thousands of other women, she never gave consent for medical procedures that involved mesh; she was never informed of the possible and actual consequences of mesh; she never gave consent to be in constant pain all her life and for her life to be made a misery; and she never consented to lacerations of vessels, nerves, organs including the bladder and the bowel, transitory local irritation of the wound, mesh extrusion and so it goes on. She gave me a really tough list to read.

Neil Findlay: Has Tavish Scott's constituent even guesstimated how much all her treatment has cost the NHS to date?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure whether this applies to Mr Scott's constituent, but I ask members not to get into cases that might be the subject of civil actions. I caution members that cases might be sub judice.

Tavish Scott: You do not need to caution me about legal action in this case, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is fine—thank you.

Tavish Scott: I take Neil Findlay's point, but the answer is no—Bobbie has better things to do than worry about how much the treatment has cost. She has to worry about how to care for her son, never mind dealing with all that.

Neil Findlay: My point was that the cost that the NHS has incurred could easily pay to bring the doctor to Scotland to carry out procedures.

Tavish Scott: I entirely take that point.

I will make two other points, both of which are on issues that Neil Findlay reflected on. First, individuals are facing not only physical pain and pressure, but psychological pressure. I am really concerned that the NHS is trying to force women to see the same clinician in the same hospital where they had the treatment that caused all the difficulties in the first place. If someone who is going through such pain in these circumstances asks for a different clinician at a different hospital, that is what should happen. If the cabinet secretary were to help people to do that, that would be a very important step.

Secondly, Neil Findlay mentioned the Government statement. I was concerned when I read:

“we would be happy to discuss with both health boards and professionals funding of additional education and training where a specific need is identified.”

I am a great admirer of Jeane Freeman—she is a very able politician and a great operator, which is

badly needed in politics at the moment. I hope that she will reflect on her spokesperson saying in the statement:

“where a specific need is identified.”

That is what this Parliament has done. It has done that through the campaigning of Jackson Carlaw, Alex Neil and Neil Findlay; it has done that through colleagues across the political parties. We need leadership from the Government. Bobbie Dailly deserves to have all that mesh out of her body. Will the Government please make sure that that now happens?

18:36

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Neil Findlay for bringing this members’ business debate to the chamber and pay tribute to his passionate support of mesh victims not just in Scotland, but throughout the world.

Tonight, we are debating an issue—I think that this is beyond dispute—that will go down in history as one of the greatest medical injustices ever suffered by women. Cross-party consensus has existed since the horrendous problems with mesh implants came to light, which resulted in the ill-fated moratorium on implants in 2014, instigated by the then health secretary Alex Neil, who continues to fight long and hard for justice for mesh victims. We now have a ban on implants, brought in by the current health secretary Jeane Freeman, which was warmly welcomed by campaigners. However, this is not the time to dwell on the history of this scandalous issue.

Neil Findlay’s motion says that the Scottish Government is refusing to bring renowned mesh specialist Dr Veronikis to train surgeons and perform mesh removal operations in Scotland. I look forward to hearing the cabinet secretary’s response to the motion.

Nothing should be off the table. This should not be a political issue, and I am glad that we have always had consensus across the chamber on this matter. The many women in the gallery today could not care less about politics; they just want respite from the daily struggle that they have endured since their operation was performed.

The journalist Marion Scott did not get involved with the campaign because it is a good story; she got involved in order to get answers about why a procedure that women were told would help them has ruined their lives.

The women have been badly let down by health boards, the medical establishment and a disgraceful flawed review. In the past, I have called the women brave and courageous—which they are—for taking on this fight, but I do not think

that that is any comfort, because I am sure that most days they do not feel brave or courageous.

Last Friday, when I met directors at Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board about a constituency matter, I raised the issue of Dr Veronikis coming to Scotland. They told me that exchange training visits between surgeons happen regularly, and are reciprocal; our top specialists go abroad to train surgeons in other countries and many come here to do the same. I was also told that the visits take place under the chief medical officer’s direction, and that there is a budget for such visits. I found that to be very encouraging. However, as Neil Findlay said, anyone who is providing assistance to health boards must have appropriate GMC clearance. Dr Veronikis is not registered with the GMC, but I hope that a solution can be found to resolve that issue. I was encouraged by Neil Findlay’s comments in that regard.

I urge health boards to consent to finding a way to bring Dr Veronikis here for the sake of the sufferers and the benefit of our surgeons who wish to expand their knowledge and skills. The bottom line is that we should be performing such operations in Scotland.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): The member makes extremely interesting points. Does she agree that the chief medical officer should take an interest, particularly since she has recently set out her feelings on women’s health inequalities in Scotland?

Rona Mackay: I agree. This is an ideal opportunity for the CMO to demonstrate that she means what she says about women’s health inequalities. There could be no greater cause than this one.

I echo Alex Neil’s call for a global conference to be held in Scotland. We can lead the way in the fight for justice. We have the best campaigners in the world in the mesh survivors group, our country has a reputation for fairness and we must always stand united with mesh sufferers here and throughout the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Due to the number of members who still wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I ask Neil Findlay to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Neil Findlay]

Motion agreed to.

18:40

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I want to record my thanks to Neil Findlay, Jackson Carlaw and Alex Neil for their commitment to campaigning for justice for mesh victims. Of course, it goes without saying that I thank all the campaigners who have worked tirelessly and passionately to get these women the justice that they deserve, and I welcome them to the public gallery.

As shown by the strength of feeling in the chamber, there is a great deal of disappointment among mesh victims over the Scottish Government's decision to decline the offer that has been made by Dr Veronikis. One can only imagine the pain that victims face on a daily basis, and the worry that is experienced by those who are yet to learn whether the mesh will have the same life-altering impact on them that it has had on the women whom they have met and read about.

I hope that, today, we can have a frank and honest discussion about the best way forward for mesh victims. If it is feasible for Dr Veronikis to make the journey to Scotland, that option should of course be fully explored.

No one wishes to see mesh victims suffering needlessly; I have no doubt that we are all in agreement on that today. The journey to the stage that we are at, at which we are beginning to consider solutions, has been a long and difficult one. The mesh, which can be used in relation to pelvic organ prolapse and incontinence in women, has been used in more than 20,000 women in Scotland over the past 20 years. Although there have been a number of high-profile cases in the media, the number of women who have been affected is, unfortunately, unknown.

The potential side-effects of the mesh are truly awful. They can range from chronic pain and loss of sexual function to major complications such as the implant intruding through the bladder or bowel, which can necessitate the removal of organs. The mesh can shrink or move inside the body, slicing through nerve endings, tissue and organs, and it is very difficult or sometimes impossible to remove it.

The offer that has been made by Dr Veronikis is, therefore, appealing, and I can completely understand why it would no doubt have given hope to people who have been affected and those who are worried about the future.

The Scottish Conservatives have been on the side of victims from the start, led by Jackson Carlaw. In 2017, 97 MSPs signed a pledge opposing any whitewashing of the mesh report. Scottish Conservative MSPs have called for an end to damaging mesh procedures in Scotland, and we welcomed the halt to mesh procedures that was announced by the cabinet secretary last

September. That support will continue, which is why we call on the Scottish Government to give full consideration to the offer that has been made and, if feasible, given the necessary checks, to proceed.

I, too, attended Neil Findlay's press conference this afternoon, and it was truly heartbreaking to hear the stories of how the mesh has completely ruined these women's lives. One lady told us that she was on the list to have both her bowel and her bladder removed. Another informed us that, having been told that she would go back to work in a university six weeks after having the operation, it is now 10 years later, and she has never returned.

Hearing the story of Dr Mary McLaughlin, a mesh victim from Belfast who paid for an operation on herself by Dr Veronikis, was eye-opening, and I can completely understand the frustration of the women who want the same. It is only right that we explore the option in full and listen properly to the concerns of the women who are affected so that they do not feel that they are fighting a constant uphill battle to be heard.

I finish by again thanking the campaigners who have fought hard on this issue. This is a really difficult situation and, although we are entering uncharted territory, it is important that decisions are made with caution and care. All of us in the chamber want the best possible course of action to be taken, which is why the Scottish Conservatives are calling for the offer to be fully explored. We owe that to mesh victims. Hearing their stories again this afternoon reaffirmed that for me.

18:44

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I commend Neil Findlay for securing the debate, and for his tireless work to uncover this women's health scandal and get help and justice for the women victims. Other members, including Jackson Carlaw, Alex Neil and members of the Public Petitions Committee, have also worked for justice on behalf of mesh survivors and campaigners.

The survivors have been fighting for others; now they have hope for themselves. I reiterate that important point, which has already been made in the debate. I particularly commend the *Sunday Post* reporter Marion Scott, for her fearless determination to expose the issues and to support the brave women who are involved in the mesh campaign.

We know that mesh is supposed to be banned from use following the lengthy campaign, but we still hear stories about it being used—in some cases without the knowledge and consent of the patient, which is worrying. We need to remind

ourselves that the mesh that we are discussing can carry with it serious complications, including chronic pain, sexual problems, mesh exposure through vaginal tissue and injury to nearby organs including the bladder and bowel.

As Miles Briggs said, a few months ago, Marion Scott and some of the mesh campaigners spoke at the cross-party group on chronic pain, of which I am a co-convenor, to highlight the on-going problems that women are suffering, and to seek help and support. For many women, that must now mean having the mesh properly and fully removed.

The Scottish Government today said that full mesh removal is already being provided by specialist staff working in Scotland. We really need clarification on that, because it is strongly disputed and, it seems, the only option that is currently available in Scotland for many women sufferers is partial removal, which often makes the situation worse and can cause autoimmune disorders. I am sad to say that we know how autoimmune disorders are treated as a result of the thyroid scandal, which is another women's health scandal to add to the list that Monica Lennon put on the record.

Removal did not go well for Lorna Farrell, from whom we heard at the press conference today, and whose story was in last week's *Sunday Post*. Lorna is now a wheelchair user, following supposed removal of mesh by surgeons in Scotland. She says that her specialist admitted that they cannot fully remove mesh implants of the type that has been most used in Scotland. Not only does Lorna now have increased pain, but has mesh left inside her.

Claire Daisley's story was also outlined in the *Sunday Post*. She, too, is in a wheelchair after removal surgery, and is waiting to have her bowel and bladder removed. She hopes that it is not too late for other options.

Many women have been crippled with pain following mesh implants. I understand that some mesh was not even thoroughly tested before it was used on women. Now women are being further damaged by botched efforts to remove it.

Safe removal is the very least that our NHS should be providing, and it could do so, because, as we heard from Neil Findlay and others, Dr Veronikis, who is an eminent specialist from the US, could not only perform life-changing surgery to reverse the damaging procedures that were performed on Scottish women, but could train surgeons here to perform the procedure. That is important. There does not seem to be anything standing in the way of that except the Scottish Government not having agreed to it.

As we heard, Mary McLaughlin from Northern Ireland had a successful removal procedure by Dr Veronikis. She has her life back. At today's press conference, mesh survivors said that they want to be Mary. Of course, Mary had to pay for the procedure herself: there is a divide between those who have personal funds that they can get together and those who do not. Women who have lost their livelihoods and depend on benefits cannot pay to go to America for surgery. Surely, in that case, that surgery must come to them. Mesh survivors campaigned for seven years to have mesh banned. They cannot be expected to campaign for another seven years for life-changing surgery to remove the mesh.

Jeane Freeman can stop this scandal: she can give women their lives and jobs back. She must do that. Not only would it be right for the individual women, it would be much more cost effective in the long run for the NHS, and for society as a whole.

18:49

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I congratulate Neil Findlay on securing this members' business debate.

In my nearly 12 years as an MSP, constituents have raised many difficult and challenging issues with me, but I will certainly never forget what one constituent told me in 2017 about the pain that she lives with daily because she had a transvaginal mesh implant. It has affected my constituent's ability to do simple tasks that most of us take for granted. It has become very problematic for her, and she would not wish the pain and suffering on anyone.

Other women in Inverclyde have contacted me about the issue and informed me of similar things that they have to deal with day-to-day. I acknowledge and appreciate the devastating impact that mesh implants can have on a person's life. However, even in the most difficult of situations, politicians sometimes need to take a wee step back to try to take a balanced view. As the briefing for today's debate by the Scottish Parliament information centre notes, it has been acknowledged that damage from transvaginal mesh is not inevitable and that, for some women, the procedure has been successful and they continue to be pain free.

Notwithstanding that, I highlight the suffering that I have mentioned. One woman being negatively affected by a mesh implant is one woman too many. It is clear that the problems of mesh implants have affected far too many women in Scotland, so something must certainly be done to improve the situation.

In September last year, Jeane Freeman, as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, took the bold decision to ban, in effect, use of transvaginal mesh in NHS Scotland for pelvic organ prolapse and stress urinary incontinence. Some people might argue that the decision should have been taken earlier, but I am glad that the Government listened to the recommendations that were made by the Public Petitions Committee, which has been referred to. I welcomed the decision then, but we now have a new challenge, which is the issue that is in the motion that Neil Findlay has lodged, with regard to Dr Veronikis coming to Scotland to support patients who have mesh implants that need to be removed.

With approximately 1,000 women potentially needing implants to be removed, it appears that there is merit in Dr Veronikis coming to Scotland to help. I am not an expert, by any means, and whether Dr Veronikis comes here or Scottish women go to America to get assistance from him, I will not take the decision. However, the argument is very strong for Dr Veronikis coming here to treat women and educate our professionals so that Scotland's NHS could deal with the situation in the future, rather than having to rely on bringing someone from America or elsewhere to deal with it. Teaching and educating our professionals is so important, in my opinion.

I would like measures to be implemented to help not just my constituents, but all the women in Scotland who need the assistance. The contributions from colleagues across the chamber have been extremely powerful in that regard. If there is a reason for Dr Veronikis not to come here to help my constituents and all the women of Scotland, I would like to be aware of it.

I am keen that our NHS obtain the assistance of that expert and deliver improved outcomes for many women in Scotland. In politics, we sometimes talk about inputs and outcomes: inputs are the money and outcomes are how it is spent. To me, the situation is very simple: the input is to get an expert to come over to help and the outcome is for women to have a better life that is free of pain. That is an extremely strong message. I encourage the cabinet secretary: regardless of whether it is for her or the NHS boards to decide, bringing Dr Veronikis over here would be extremely useful for all the women of Scotland.

18:53

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I am grateful for the opportunity to close this very important debate, and I thank Mr Findlay for bringing it to the chamber. I recognise that very many women have suffered—and continue to suffer—a significant amount of pain, distress, immobility and deterioration in the quality

of their lives as a result of mesh complications. As others have done, I express my sympathy to them, but I know that that sympathy is of little use when their daily life is so marred by something that they thought would help them but that has made their situation worse.

Before I go any further, I want to recognise the tireless work of the mesh survivors group and of colleagues across the chamber—many of whom have spoken tonight—in making sure that these issues are front of mind. I remain convinced that the decision that I took last year to halt the use of transvaginal mesh for pelvic organ prolapse and stress urinary incontinence was and remains the right one. However, I am also convinced that a great deal of the evidence and impetus to make that decision came from those women.

It is right to turn now to the question of their situation and the complications and pain that they face. Let me repeat: full mesh removal is available in Scotland and photographic evidence is used in that procedure. It is clear that there is dispute about that. Therefore, before I go any further, I offer to discuss with Neil Findlay, Jackson Carlaw and Alex Neil—the three members who have prominently led the Parliament's work on the issue—the evidence that I have to support that against the view, which women expressed earlier today and elsewhere and which may be expressed to me later, when I meet some of them, that that is not the case.

Neil Findlay: At the event today, I used this analogy about full mesh removal. I could come along with a piece of chewing gum and stick it in the cabinet secretary's hair. I could then come along with a pair of scissors and quickly chop it out, or I could come along with an instrument that would remove that piece of gum from one hair at a time. That is the difference that we are talking about. If we do the former, we damage people's tissue and nerves, leaving them in chronic pain. Taking Dr Veronikis's approach, microsurgery removes the mesh in a single piece, with very little damage. Even if the cabinet secretary provides us with the evidence, it will not be comparing apples with apples.

Jeane Freeman: I hear what Mr Findlay says. I would like him to wait until I have finished, so that he hears everything that I am going to say as well.

Neil Findlay: Does she accept that point?

Jeane Freeman: I take the point that he makes, but he and I are not clinicians.

Neil Findlay: I never said that I was.

Jeane Freeman: Let us proceed in as calm and reasonable a way as we possibly can.

Our specialist centres offer a range of treatments and, importantly, those treatments are

considered on a case-by-case basis. The shared decision making and informed consent in that process are important. We touched on some of that last year, when I took the decision to end the use of mesh for the conditions that I mentioned.

I do not have all the detail that Mr Briggs asked for, but I will make sure that that is provided to him and to other members. The information that I have is that, after mesh removal procedures, photographic evidence is taken. There remain approximately 120 referrals to the service per year, and full groin dissections are currently performed at the rate of two per month. As I say, I will make available to him the other information that he asked for.

The clinicians who are involved in those two specialist centres are highly skilled and trained. Let me be clear—because this point has been raised—that GMC guidelines make it clear that no treatment should be refused to a patient because that patient either has complained or is engaged in litigation with the clinician involved. Should that be happening, I want to know, because that is absolutely contrary to GMC guidelines.

Like clinicians across our national health service, those clinicians are engaged in continually developing their skills and practice. As Rona Mackay rightly said, there is a process by which that happens. Across our health service, it is commonplace to exchange clinicians between one country and another to enable them to learn new techniques and to study the research and data that are gathered in order to improve their skills and understanding. There is a process to ensure that that happens. It need not be a lengthy or complicated process, but it is important nonetheless.

It is not for me, as the cabinet secretary, to decide what clinical practice or clinical learning should take place. That decision is for the clinical community to make in conjunction with the health boards and, sometimes, with the involvement of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. I am really clear about what my job is.

Elaine Smith: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Jeane Freeman: Give me a second.

If that is considered by clinicians to be the right thing to do, my job is to help to make that happen.

Before I take Elaine Smith's intervention, let me be absolutely clear for the record that I have not refused an invitation from Dr Veronikis. What I have said—Mr Findlay rightly made this clear in his opening speech—is that there is a process to go through and that, if the clinicians believe, or if the health board or the royal college believes, that

something would be useful to them, my job is to help to make that happen where I can.

Elaine Smith: We have moved on slightly. I certainly hope that the cabinet secretary wishes to make it clear to the health boards that she wants the issue to be pursued.

However, the cabinet secretary did take a clinical decision. If she had not banned the use of mesh, clinicians in Scotland would still be using it. The clinical decision would still be to use mesh if the cabinet secretary had not taken the decision to have it banned.

Jeane Freeman: I made that decision on the basis of clinical advice and clinical evidence. The point that I am making is that none of us in the chamber are clinicians.

Neil Findlay: I did not say that we are.

Jeane Freeman: I am not arguing that Mr Findlay said that we are; I am simply trying to take us through the right thing for me, as the cabinet secretary, to do and where I need to get advice from in that regard.

Neil Findlay: Since I wrote to the cabinet secretary about the matter initially, has she initiated discussions? What has been the outcome of those discussions? How much further have we moved the issue forward in the intervening time? Is it today's parliamentary debate that will ensure that those discussions begin?

Jeane Freeman: No. Today's parliamentary debate will not ensure that we begin those discussions. Members will remember, from the last statement that I made on mesh, that I talked about accountable officers, who are, in effect, our medical directors in our individual health boards. They met on 22 February and considered some of the follow-through from the exceptional circumstance protocol, the halting of the use of mesh in the procedures that I talked about, and the high-vigilance scrutiny and registry. There have also been discussions between me and the chief medical officer about whether additional expertise and techniques could be helpful to the specialist centres involved in Scotland. I will get to that point, but we will continue to see whether that is possible.

We have pursued another issue with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency—I believe that Mr Findlay and others know about that. Mesh needs to be proven to be safe, and we have pursued with the MHRA, which is the UK body that approves the use of mesh and other such devices, the evidence that it can offer us. We have pursued with it what evidence it has of the procedures that it went through in order to be assured of the safety of that particular product, and we continue to pursue that evidence.

I repeat: nobody needs to “implore” or “beg” me. I completely understand that the women involved rightly want the best possible response to the situation in which they find themselves. For many of them, that will require full mesh removal. With the clinicians involved, we—and I—need to look at whether additional training, expertise and learning can be provided by Dr Veronikis or others and what we need to do to ensure that that happens.

I have heard what has been said, and I respect absolutely what colleagues say. I remember being in the Parliament’s garden lobby the first time that the women who are affected came to the Parliament. With the chief medical officer and the clinical community, I will look at what further learning and inquiries on techniques—

Johann Lamont: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—the cabinet secretary must conclude.

Neil Findlay: Go on, Presiding Officer. Give us a minute more.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary has now been speaking for 11 minutes. I can give her a little longer, but we will need to conclude shortly.

Jeane Freeman: I appreciate that, Presiding Officer. I am almost finished.

My mind is not closed on the matter. It is not entirely my decision, but I will work with the clinical community and the chief medical officer, and I will have further discussions in that regard. I have not refused Dr Veronikis’s offer. It is not for me to accept that offer, but I will discuss with the clinical community how, in its opinion, learning and techniques could be improved and enhanced. We will do that.

Meeting closed at 19:05.

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