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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS
OFFICIAL REPORT

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Wednesday 17 July 2024

King's Speech

11.30 am

The King, seated on the Throne and attended by His Officers of State, commanded that the Lady Usher of the Black Rod should let the Commons know that it was His Majesty's pleasure that they attend Him immediately in this House.

When they had come with their Speaker, His Majesty was pleased to speak as follows:

"My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, my Government will govern in service to the country.

My Government's legislative programme will be mission led and based upon the principles of security, fairness and opportunity for all.

Stability will be the cornerstone of my Government's economic policy and every decision will be consistent with its fiscal rules. It will legislate to ensure that all significant tax and spending changes are subject to an independent assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility. Bills will be brought forward to strengthen audit and corporate governance, alongside pension investment.

Securing economic growth will be a fundamental mission. My Government will seek a new partnership with both business and working people and help the country move on from the recent cost of living challenges by prioritising wealth creation for all communities. My Ministers will establish an Industrial Strategy Council. It is my Government's objective to see rising living standards in all nations and regions in the United Kingdom.

My Ministers will get Britain building, including through planning reform, as they seek to accelerate the delivery of high quality infrastructure and housing. They will also pursue sustainable growth by encouraging investment in industry, skills and new technologies.

My Government is committed to making work pay and will legislate to introduce a new deal for working people to ban exploitative practices and enhance employment rights. It will seek to establish the appropriate legislation to place requirements on those working to develop the most powerful artificial intelligence models.

My Government believes that greater devolution of decision making is at the heart of a modern dynamic economy and is a key driver of economic growth and my Ministers will introduce an English Devolution Bill. Legislation will be introduced to give new powers to metro mayors and combined authorities. This will support local growth plans that bring economic benefit to communities.

A Bill will be introduced to allow local leaders to take control of their local bus services. My Ministers will bring forward legislation to improve the railways by reforming rail franchising, establishing Great British Railways and bringing train operators into public ownership.

Taken together these policies will enhance Britain's position as a leading industrial nation and enable the country to take advantage of new opportunities that can promote growth and wealth creation.

My Government recognises the urgency of the global climate challenge and the new job opportunities that can come from leading the development of the technologies of the future. It is committed to a clean energy transition which will lower energy bills for consumers over time. A Bill will be introduced to set up Great British Energy, a publicly owned clean power company headquartered in Scotland, which will help accelerate investment in renewable energy such as offshore wind. Legislation will be brought forward to help the country achieve energy independence and unlock investment in energy infrastructure. A Bill will be introduced to support sustainable aviation fuel production. My Government recognises the need to improve water quality and a Bill will be introduced to strengthen the powers of the water regulator.

My Government will seek to strengthen the border and make streets safer. A Bill will be introduced to modernise the asylum and immigration system, establishing a new Border Security Command and delivering enhanced counter terror powers to tackle organised immigration crime. Legislation will be brought forward to strengthen community policing, give the police greater powers to deal with anti social behaviour and strengthen support for victims.

Measures will be introduced to improve the safety and security of public venues and help keep the British public safe from terrorism. My Government will bring forward plans to halve violence against women and girls.

My Ministers will seek to raise educational standards and break down barriers to opportunity. Action will be taken to get people back in employment following the impact of the pandemic. A Bill will be introduced to raise standards in education and promote children's wellbeing. Measures will be brought forward to remove the exemption from Value Added Tax for private school fees, which will enable the funding of six and a half thousand new teachers. My Government will establish Skills England which will have a new partnership with employers at its heart, and my Ministers will reform the apprenticeship levy.

Legislation will be introduced to give greater rights and protections to people renting their homes, including ending no fault evictions and reforming grounds for possession. Draft legislation will be published on leasehold and commonhold reform.

A Bill will be introduced to establish an independent football regulator to ensure greater sustainability in the game and strengthen protections for fans.

My Government will improve the National Health Service as a service for all, providing care on the basis of need regardless of the ability to pay. It will seek to reduce the waiting times, focus on prevention and improve mental health provision for young people. It will ensure mental health is given the same attention and focus as physical health. My Ministers will legislate to modernise the Mental Health Act so it is fit for the twenty first century. A Bill will be introduced to progressively increase the age at which people can buy cigarettes and impose limits on the sale and marketing

of vapes. My Ministers will also legislate to restrict advertising of junk food to children along with the sale of high caffeine energy drinks to children. A draft Bill will be brought forward to ban conversion practices.

My Government will take steps to help rebuild trust and foster respect. Legislation will be brought forward to introduce a duty of candour for public servants. A Bill will be introduced to establish a statutory Armed Forces Commissioner to act as a strong independent champion for our gallant Armed Forces and their families.

Legislation on race equality will be published in draft to enshrine the full right to equal pay in law.

My Government will strengthen its work with the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland so that the best outcomes possible are delivered for citizens across the United Kingdom. My Ministers will establish a new Council of the Nations and Regions to renew opportunities for the Prime Minister, heads of devolved governments and mayors of combined authorities to collaborate with each other.

My Government will continue to support the political institutions and devolved government in Northern Ireland. In consultation with all parties, measures will be brought forward to begin the process of repealing and replacing the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

Measures to modernise the constitution will be introduced including House of Lords reform to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the Lords. My Ministers will strengthen the integrity of elections and encourage wide participation in the democratic process.

The Government will propose a modernisation committee of the House of Commons which will be tasked with driving up standards, improving work practices and reforming procedures.

My Government will ensure a strong defence based on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's common values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Its commitment to NATO will remain unshakeable. It will maintain a strong Armed Forces, including the nuclear deterrent. To ensure that the United Kingdom's defence capabilities are matched to the changing nature of global strategic threats, my Government will conduct a Strategic Defence Review.

My Government will continue to give its full support to Ukraine and its people and it will endeavour to play a leading role in providing Ukraine with a clear path to NATO membership.

My Government will seek to reset the relationship with European partners and work to improve the United Kingdom's trade and investment relationship with the European Union. My Ministers will seek a new security pact to strengthen cooperation on the mutual threats faced by the United Kingdom and the European Union.

My Government will play its part in trying to secure long term peace and security in the Middle East. It is committed to a two state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

Later this week, my Government will host the European Political Community meeting at Blenheim Palace. The Queen and I look forward to our Visit to Samoa alongside the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October, and our Visit to Australia.

Members of the House of Commons, estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, other measures will be laid before you.

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels".

11.48 am

The House adjourned during pleasure.

3.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham.

Select Vestries Bill

First Reading

3.38 pm

The Bill was read a first time pro forma.

King's Speech

Debate (1st Day)

3.38 pm

The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith): My Lords, I have to acquaint the House that His Majesty was pleased this morning to make a most gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament assembled in the House of Lords. Copies of the gracious Speech are available in the Printed Paper Office.

I have, for the convenience of the House, arranged for the terms of the gracious Speech to be published in the *Official Report*.

Motion for an Humble Address

Moved by Lord Reid of Cardowan

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty as follows:

"Most Gracious Sovereign—We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, beg leave to thank Your Majesty for the most gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament".

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab): My Lords, it is an honour and a privilege to be asked to deliver this speech. It is also a pleasure, since I am joined by my noble friend Lady Hazarika as seconder to this speech. This will be news to noble Lords, but we were born in the same county in Lanarkshire. We were born in the same town in Lanarkshire. Indeed, we were born in

the same hospital in the same town in Lanarkshire—although, sadly, the merest glance will confirm that it was not in the same decade.

I cannot pretend to your Lordships, and nor would my noble friend, that Lanarkshire politics is a sort of preparatory school for the refinement of the House of Lords. Indeed, I was prompted to think about Lanarkshire politics this morning when I noticed in the ceremonial guide that the Gentlemen at Arms were requested to hand in their axes after the meeting. Certainly, my noble friend Lady Hazarika, among others, will know of the unfortunate tale of the leader of the council in Lanarkshire who was so ground down by the internecine warfare in his council that he was eventually hospitalised and received a get well card which read, “The Labour group wish you a speedy recovery by 18 votes to 12, with nine abstentions”.

There is no such lack of empathy in this House. Indeed, I owe much to the courtesy and assistance of so many noble Lords in this Chamber. I cannot mention them all, but there are certainly two. I will mention the noble Lord, Lord Soames, who, as Armed Forces Minister, reached across the Chamber of the House of Commons and gave me such wonderful help, advice and encouragement when I was a new shadow defence spokesman that I ended up with his job. I thank him for that.

The other noble Lord cannot be with us today, but I want to record my thanks to my noble friend Lord Kinnock, not only because he introduced me to parliamentary politics but for his courage and leadership against Labour's first bout of infantile leftism in 1983—coincidentally, the year that Michael Gove briefly joined the Labour Party. Without the leadership of my noble friend Lord Kinnock, there would have been no future Labour Governments. I have to say that, without people like that, I would not be moving this humble Address today. Therefore, I do not approach today's programme for government in a tribal fashion; I commend it to the whole House.

There may be some noble Lords who, having known me for some years—I see the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, laughing in unison—think that I cannot reach across party boundaries. For those sceptical of my qualifications to make such an appeal, I can tell them that I am, as far as I am aware, the only Labour defence spokesman ever to have addressed a Conservative audience in the Carlton Club. I will tell noble Lords what happened. At the end of an official defence visit to Cyprus, on our half-day of rest and recreation as we all relaxed around the pool of the spa, as you do, I was challenged, in the pool, by that delightfully eccentric Conservative MP Lady Olga Maitland. She challenged me to address her organisation Families for NATO, more widely known as “Babies for the Bomb”. I was happy to do so. I was less happy when she took to explaining to the bemused Tory audience in the Carlton Club that the only reason this Labour stalwart had accepted the invitation was that when she tendered it and I accepted it in Cyprus, in her words “Neither of us was fully clothed”. I have to say I am not suggesting this as a template for future government relations.

Of course, there are areas of controversy in the King's Speech—it is a very full programme—but I believe that there is much that should be given a fair wind by all sides in this Chamber: on planning, infrastructure and economic growth; on industrial strategy and local devolution; on clean energy and children's well-being; on safer streets and stronger borders; on reforming our public services, which is desperately needed; and on restoring our capability in national defence. I believe that it is a solid foundation on which to bring about the reset that our new Prime Minister mentioned on his first day in office.

It will fall to my noble friend Lady Smith to take this programme forward. I have to say she has a hard act to follow. She follows a Leader in this Chamber whose patience and courtesy seemed to me at times—how can I put it?—too good to be True.

Noble Lords: Oh!

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab): But I know that my noble friend Lady Smith is up to the task because, in my view, what Churchill said of military leadership also applies in politics:

“Without the title deeds of positive achievement no one”

has the power or the right to give clear leadership. I believe that my noble friend holds those title deeds, and not only through her service in this Chamber. I know that, as my Minister in Northern Ireland, she led and commandeered not one, not two, not three but four departments of state. So I warn my colleagues on the Front Bench: keep a tight grip on your portfolios.

There are many of our former colleagues that all of us would have wished to see here today—particularly on these Benches, if I might say so, because of the new Labour Government. There are too many to mention in full but, personally, I will miss the late Baroness McDonagh. She was respected and loved by so many of us. It is a tragedy that she did not live to see the Labour Government that she did so much to achieve.

There is now a huge responsibility on that Government, not just in implementing legislation in singular Acts that pass through this Chamber but in restoring faith in politics. As we cast an eye over our continent, we can all see the spectre of those three horsemen of extremism: economic instability; a contempt for the whole political class; and foreigners to blame. We do not need a crystal ball; we have all read the history books. These conditions have always been the harbingers of extremism. Even now, it is sweeping across Europe. For now, we have escaped it, but we may not always escape it. The next few years will determine that. It falls to us to plant the flag of democracy, including social democracy, firmly in the ground and to defend it. Above all, we need to persuade the British people to trust government and politicians a bit more through our integrity, our actions, our attitudes and our service.

So as the lodestar for the coming years, we could not choose a better one than the final words of the final speech of the late John Smith, given the night before he died:

“the opportunity to serve ... that is all we ask”.

Surely that should be sufficient for all of us. I beg to move.

3.49 pm

Baroness Hazarika (Lab): My Lords, I beg to second my noble friend's Motion for an humble Address in reply to His Majesty's most gracious Speech. I begin by thanking my noble friends the Leader of the House and the Chief Whip for doing me the great honour of asking me to speak on this historic and most auspicious occasion. I congratulate them on their appointments. My noble friends Lady Smith and Lord Kennedy show all Labour Peers such kindness, patience and friendship. They are hard-working, decent people who take their responsibilities seriously, and I mean that literally.

My noble friend Lord Kennedy in particular is a very active Chief Whip, which will of course be much needed in the years ahead. When I joined this place, just a few weeks ago, he took me aside and warned me—in a pleasant but slightly menacing way—that I would receive more text messages from him than from anyone else in my life, and he was right. I have had so many messages that my phone has automatically saved him as my special emergency contact number. It is a lot. At times, it has gone a bit “Baby Reindeer”, to be honest. If you know, you know. However, his support is very much appreciated, and I wish them both well. They will do an excellent job for their party and for this House, which they care deeply about.

I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Reid. As he said, we both hail from the same part of Scotland. We were born in Bellshill Maternity Hospital in North Lanarkshire. I do not know whether it was testament to what we went on to achieve, but it has now been destroyed as a building. He went to school in Coatbridge, where I grew up, at St Pat's, a great school, alongside a very dear friend, my noble friend Lady Liddell of Coatdyke—what alumni. They had a historical first, as the first pair of state school kids to serve in a Cabinet together. Yes, it is very impressive. My noble friend Lord Reid put this to the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He said, “Look, we're the first set of state kids from the same comprehensive to get into the Cabinet—what do you think about that?” Apparently, the former Prime Minister said, “That is good, but I think I've done a bit better than both of you”.

My father was the local family GP in Coatbridge back in the 1970s and 1980s. As I have said before in this House, it was not easy being an immigrant in Coatbridge at that time. There were not a lot of black or brown people—a lot of Orange folk, mind. We love a tanning booth in Coatbridge; what can I say? When my dad first started as a doctor, one of his patients said to him, “What are you?” “A Muslim”, he replied. “Aye, but what kind? A Rangers Muslim or a Celtic Muslim?” Given my noble friend's great role as chairman of Celtic Football Club, I think I know what the answer should have been to that question. I did tell that story in my maiden speech but, like our great King, I am very much into recycling these days.

It is a real honour to follow my noble friend Lord Reid. I have really admired him throughout my career and also been slightly scared of him, as he is known as the hard man of Scottish politics—that is a compliment, by the way. I am a relatively new Member of this House. I made my maiden speech on the very last day

of the last Parliament. It is so exciting to be here, speaking on the first day of this new Session. I gather that the role of being a seconder is given to someone on the up. I thought I had better get a move on, because I am now 48 years old and, with the rumoured retirement age of 80, I have only another 32 years left to make my mark.

This is a bit shallow, but I will be honest with you: as a woman of a certain age, I was feeling a wee bit depressed about my advancing years, but not any more. I have to say that I feel rather sprightly since coming here—I have never felt so good. I am normally a bit of a lefty, feminist battle-axe when it comes to any comments about my personal appearance, until a very lovely Lord from the other side took me aside recently and said: “I hope you don't mind me saying this but it's so nice to have a fine young thing like you in here”. To which I said: “Who, me? Stop it, stop it!”. My beauty advice to ladies of a certain age is that you honestly do not need to get Botox—you just need a peerage.

There are many people of many ages here, including many who are younger than me, and they have been so kind to me, and it is really appreciated. Many of us recognise that this place does need reform, but, in the meantime, the voices of people from all backgrounds and all ages should be heard in this very special place.

This takes me to the King's Speech. We have a relatively new King and we have a very new Prime Minister. This is the first transfer of power to a Labour Administration since 1997—that is 27 years ago. Things were very different back then: there was no social media and there were no mobile phones—I do not know how the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, would have survived, to be honest. The film “Titanic” was released back in 1997, which was the last time Leonardo DiCaprio was seen with a woman his own age—yes, it was a very long time ago.

As a wise man once said: “This is no time for soundbites, but I feel the hand of history on my shoulder”. This is a significant moment, because this is the legislative to-do list for this new Government. Our new Prime Minister has pledged to govern in service to this great country. This is a bold set of plans which is mission-led and based on prosperity, security, fairness and opportunity for all. It shows ambition, breadth and modernity. There are important measures to stimulate growth and to get Britain building again—houses, and vital transport and infrastructure. But here are a few other highlights which stand out to me.

I am most pleased to see the workers' rights Bill. We cannot get growth if we do not have a motivated and productive workforce. Treating workers well is the right thing to do. Every single one of us in this House was shocked by the way P&O Ferries sacked its staff two years ago—that kind of behaviour should not be accepted in this day and age. Our trade unions do such important work, and I pay tribute to the many Members in this House who have dedicated their lives to better employment rights. At their best, trade unions are a strong friend at work, and if we are to get growth, there is a sweet spot where businesses, employers and trade unions work in a co-operative partnership.

As someone who, in a previous life, helped draft the Equality Act 2010, I was heartened to see plans for a draft race equalities Act, which will give people from black, Asian or other ethnic-minority backgrounds the right to equal pay in law. Just as sex-based pay discrimination has no place, nor should racial discrimination.

Violence against women and girls is at an epidemic level. In recent years in the UK, a woman has been killed by a man every three days on average. We are all in this House still in profound shock over the recent murders of Carol, Louise and Hannah Hunt; we send our condolences and love to John Hunt—a grief-stricken husband and father. The draft Bill and the mission to halve these brutal, devastating statistics is something we should all want to achieve for our daughters, granddaughters, nieces and sisters. We must all do better as a society.

Finally, I am glad to see devolution play such a prominent role. Just under two years ago, when our King acceded to the British Throne, I greatly admired the way he showed genuine affection and respect for our nations and regions by visiting them straight away—especially Scotland, which was his first stop. I was there, outside the Scottish Parliament, reporting. People were so enthusiastic and touched, not just by his presence but by the fact he was wearing a kilt. In fact, the woman next to me commented: “It’s no’ easy looking good in a kilt—and fair play, he’s got a cracking set of pins”. Our new Prime Minister made a similar trip across these great isles, but, thankfully, very much in trousers. I am pleased to see the creation of a council of nations and regions which will bring together our First Ministers and regional mayors and their collective wisdom. I am also pleased to see that GB Energy will be headquartered in Scotland.

I could not let the occasion pass without remarking on the fact that my side had a very good night in Scotland, after many years in the wilderness. At one point, there were more pandas in Edinburgh Zoo than Labour MPs in Scotland. There was just one Scottish Labour MP for a long time, and he is now the new Scottish Secretary. I asked him what the best thing was about going from one to 37, and he said: “I’ll tell you what—secret Santa’s going to be so much more fun this year”.

Having lost a fair few elections—actually, many—on this side, we know how painful it is to lose power. I say in good faith that I hope the opposite Benches learn the right lessons and regroup, because good governance needs good opposition. That is an important function of our democracy.

This is a big moment for all of us here today, as we start a new Session of Parliament under a new Labour Government. Yes, there is excitement, passion and anticipation, but there is also humility and a recognition that it has been a long, hard, tough spell in Opposition for 14 years. My noble and good friend Lord Reid cited the inspiring words about the opportunity to serve from the late great John Smith—perhaps the greatest Prime Minister we never had. John Smith also said this in his first ever speech as Labour leader in 1992:

“I say to the people of this country it is right that we are ambitious for ourselves and for our children. It is right that we should aspire for better lives and for a better Britain. But let the ambition and aspiration of our people be matched by the commitment and action of their Government”.

Those words seem so pertinent as we stand here today. We have been given the chance to serve by the British people. We now need to get to work and deliver for them.

It has been such a privilege to speak here today. I second my noble friend’s Motion for an Humble Address in reply to His Majesty’s most gracious Speech.

Motion to Adjourn

Moved by Lord True

That this debate be adjourned till tomorrow.

4.03 pm

Lord True (Con): My Lords, what a privilege it is to follow the noble Lord, Lord Reid of Cardowan, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hazarika—two absolutely brilliant children of Coatbridge.

The speech from the noble Lord, Lord Reid, was, as ever, brilliant, humorous and direct. When I was at that Dispatch Box and saw him staring with that disarming smile, I knew I was in for big trouble, but I always knew that no political difference would ever stop a friendly drink afterwards in the Bishops’ Bar. That is the true spirit of our House, and may it always be so. I was shocked to find that the noble Lord is 77 years young, and I would hate to see him go at the end of the Parliament—along with 89 of our other friends on the Benches opposite. Seriously, we can ill afford to lose such voices of experience.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hazarika, has already charmed the House by her intelligence and good humour. As many in the House will know, alongside her brilliant public, political and professional broadcasting careers, she has been a successful stand-up comic, which is one of the hardest things to be. Today she certainly proved why—and how much we look forward to hearing from her in both the serious and the humorous vein, which she combines so well.

My last engagement as Lord Privy Seal was the state banquet for the Emperor of Japan. As I sat there listening to him speaking of his late grandfather, I was reminded of the broadcast that the Emperor Hirohito gave in 1945 after the dropping of the atomic bomb. He declared:

“The war situation has developed not necessarily to the advantage of Japan”.

I think I may say that, since that banquet, the political situation has developed not necessarily to the advantage of the Conservative Party. We now find ourselves with a different view to contemplate—although, when I look at the Cross Benches opposite and recall all those repeated ping-pongs and 409 defeats, I wonder whether some up there now may feel themselves in more congenial company, especially if they will not reach 80 by 2029.

I wholeheartedly congratulate the Labour Party on its victory. I particularly congratulate all those on the Front Bench opposite and those who have supported them, who worked so hard in the long, bleak years in

[LORD TRUE]

opposition. I remember how that was. I also particularly congratulate our new Leader, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Basildon. It was a huge pleasure to work with her in government. I would usually benefit from her candour but I could always rely on her word, and I pledge to your Lordships that, whenever the noble Baroness puts the interests of the whole House first, I will work with her in the same constructive spirit.

When the noble Baroness replies, I hope that she can say something about the balance of what to me looks a very overweight legislative programme. How long will this Session actually be? I trust that ample time will be given to your Lordships to scrutinise these measures. Can she tell us how many Bills will start in this House and which will be the first we receive?

Noble Lords will note that I cannot go on without a kind word about the Liberal Democrats. I congratulate them, too, on their successes, and declare that they are no longer quite so grossly overrepresented in your Lordships' House. Perhaps now they can leave some of the strain of making quite so many speeches to their eager new colleagues in the other place.

Of course, I welcome elements of the gracious Speech, not least the clear consistency of purpose where we stand together in support of the people of Ukraine. Like the noble Baroness, I welcome the aim to halve violence against women and girls—but surely our aim must be over time to eliminate this vile behaviour for ever. There are inconsistencies in the Speech, which no doubt will be picked out in the debate ahead—for example, the promise of devolution but the taking of more power for central government to dictate building on the green belt.

This good-humoured day will have brought joy to many on the Benches opposite, but there is a serious matter before your Lordships and, as Leader of the Opposition, I must address it. The gracious Speech alluded to one part of the manifesto package that would radically alter your Lordships' House. There are four elements: removing immediately all the formerly hereditary Peers; removing by 2029 any Peer now aged 75 or more; mandating a new participation requirement; and finally, and only then, considering how your Lordships' House might be replaced—from half of us out, I guess, to perhaps all of us out at some time, in some way that the party opposite has not managed to figure out in 25 years.

Many of us know that these proposals cannot have been put together by the noble Baroness the Leader of the House. The manifesto says that “we”—that is, the Executive—

“will introduce a new participation requirement”.

Will the noble Baroness tell us precisely what measure of participation for Peers will be planned? If it is by interruption, the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock, is very safe, as he is top of the list—but it will be interesting to know what is actually wanted.

Then we have the proposed changes to the membership of the House. The Labour Party has a political right to remove former hereditary Peers, but it has a constitutional responsibility to say what follows. It did not do that in 1999 and it still has not done so today.

No one inherits a seat in our House any more, and no hereditary Peer has the right by birth to sit and vote in this House. Our hereditary colleagues who remain are not the port-swilling backwoodsmen of ancient legend. They are people we know, some of the most active among us and some of the voices we most respect: the noble Lords, Lord Strathclyde and Lord Vaux, my noble friend Lord Howe, the Convenor of the Cross Benches—I could go on. They are dedicated Front-Benchers on both sides, Deputy Speakers and some of our most assiduous Back-Benchers all around the House. Can we afford their loss?

Then there is the element that, although not mentioned in the gracious Speech, I have alluded to: the proposed ousting of those now aged 75 or more, ejecting a great deal of accumulated wisdom that makes this House different from the other place. Again, that proposal cannot have been concocted here. The figures are stark: ejecting hereditary Peers and those now aged over 75 would remove some 390 Members of this House by 2029, including 107 Cross-Benchers—some 60% of their number would be out. That, in my submission, would be regrettable.

This is a House of consensus, compromise and convention, and I think we can do better. What guarantees that a Government's programme passes is not numbers; it is convention. I thought it quite wrong that this House defeated the last Government on record numbers of occasions and with record rounds of ping-pong. I never hid that. I thought it wrong under a Conservative Government and I think it would be wrong under a Labour Government. This House has every right—and, indeed, a duty—to engage with Ministers and to ask the other place to think again, but an unelected House must never be a House of opposition. The days of wilful defeats of an elected Government should stop, and while I am Leader of the Opposition I will seek to lead in that responsible tone.

When I was your Leader, I reached across the Chamber, as did the Convenor of the Cross Benches, to offer discussions to strengthen the conventions that guide this House in ways that would both preserve your Lordships' freedoms and give security to all Governments. That offer remains open. I believe it to be the best course, but convention will be tested, perhaps to destruction, if we plunge down the road to partisan purges and pointless conflicts.

I offer that advice in a spirit of good will and amity, and with no rancour, on a day when I salute the success of the Labour Party and the pleasure that friends opposite, if I may call them that today, take in that victory. But as we go forward, there should be consideration for all the Members of this House and consultation on all Labour's proposals for this House. There should be a search for consensus and a reinforcement of convention. I ask our Leader, whom we all so respect, to impress on her colleagues who are perhaps less understanding of this course the greater wisdom and the surer efficacy of that way.

Having been serious for a moment, let me say: peace and good will to all. It is an honour and a privilege to have served on that side, to serve on this side and to know you all as fellow workers. I wish godspeed to all in this new Parliament ahead. I beg to move that this debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

4.14 pm

Lord Newby (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Reid, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hazarika, for moving and seconding the humble Address.

Whenever the noble Lord, Lord Reid, intervenes in your Lordships' House, we all tend to lean forward slightly to make sure that we do not miss what in recent years has tended to be a lethal attack on the Government and the hapless Minister trying to defend them. He may have to modify that approach slightly under the new Government, but I am sure he will not turn from being one of the Chamber's rottweilers into a government poodle. I certainly hope not.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hazarika, among many accomplishments, is a noted comedian. Many electors, of course, think that all politicians are comedians, but she, unlike the rest of us, is able legitimately to take that as a compliment rather than a criticism, and she has shown today how she can combine both roles.

It is a great pleasure to welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, as the new Leader of your Lordships' House. We have worked closely together in recent years, particularly on matters European, and I hope that on that issue and on others we can find common cause in the future. I would also like to record my appreciation of the way in which the noble Lord, Lord True, fulfilled his role as Leader of the House. As your Lordships will know, he has not always regarded the Liberal Democrats with unalloyed positivity, but he was extremely collegiate as Leader and helpful to me personally, and I wish him well in his new role.

I also wish the Government well. They have taken over at a time of very great difficulties, both domestic and international, and my principal concern about this Government, unlike their predecessor, is not so much what they are trying to achieve, but whether their approach is ambitious enough to meet their own declared aims.

On the economy, a combination of stability, planning and a focus on growth will in itself improve market sentiment, as will some of the specific initiatives, such as the creation of Great British Energy. However, the Government's plan seems to me to be worryingly thin on workforce planning. Having ambitious plans for investment, whether in housing, infrastructure or energy, is good, but even with the planned replacement of the apprenticeship levy and reforms to FE colleges, skilled workers will be in very short supply over the course of the coming Parliament. I hope that the Government will be prepared to accept that, in the short term, such skills gaps can be fully met only by increased recruitment from overseas and that they will take steps to facilitate this.

The state of our public services has rightly been identified by the Government as dire. We welcome the focus on improving the performance of the NHS, but we believe that the Government should go further by giving patients a right to see a GP within a week and to start cancer treatment within two months of an urgent diagnosis. We are particularly disappointed to see nothing in the speech about social care, where the crisis is ever-present but the much-trailed suggestion

even of a royal commission seems to have vanished. In any event, no royal commission can help with today's problems of bed-blocking and generally inadequate levels of provision.

On the environment, the Government's approach is a welcome contrast to that of their predecessor, but on the urgent issue of the failing water companies we remain unconvinced that they are willing to take the necessary action. Water companies should not be for-profit entities, and as long as this underlying structural problem exists we have no confidence that they will meet consumer needs for clean watercourses and seas at an acceptable cost.

On foreign affairs, we support the Government's stance on Ukraine. We also agree that an immediate bilateral ceasefire in Gaza, coupled with the release of the remaining hostages, is a priority. However, we believe that the Government should go further by halting arms sales to Israel, recommencing support for UNRWA and immediately recognising the state of Palestine.

The Government's change of tone on Europe is also welcome, and we agree that working together on security and migration should be urgently progressed. However, that is not nearly enough. We should be agreeing an ambitious new youth exchange programme. We should be reaching quick agreements on trade and foodstuffs, plants and animals. We should also be looking for a much more ambitious trading arrangement, and accepting that if any long-term growth strategy is to succeed for the UK, we need to be moving towards rejoining the single market and removing the shackles that currently prevent so many businesses, particularly small businesses, doing business with our largest trading partners.

I am not entirely without hope, however. The new Attorney-General, the soon to be Lord Hermer, when asked a couple of years ago what piece of legislation he would like to see introduced, said, "The European Union (Please Can We Come Back?) Act". I assure him that, were he to introduce such a Bill into your Lordships' House, he would have the wholehearted support of the Liberal Democrats.

In our view, the area where the Government's approach falls spectacularly short of what is required relates to the way in which we run our democracy. I can see why today the Labour Party thinks that a system that gives it a landslide victory on a mere one-third of the votes has a lot to recommend it, but even it must accept that this system stinks. For once, the Liberal Democrats find ourselves with a number of MPs that broadly reflects our vote share. However, the sense of injustice that we have felt in the past is now rightly being felt by those who voted Reform or Green. It is therefore hardly surprising that there is a cynicism across the country about a system that produces such a result. That cynicism leads in some cases to anger and in others to apathy. In either case it is bad for democracy and should be rectified by the introduction of a proportional electoral system, in line with Labour Party policy.

As for your Lordships' House, we enter this Parliament in a position where, after all the new appointees are introduced, we will see the Conservatives with 281 Peers

[LORD NEWBY]

compared to our 80. Noble Lords will recall that, after the previous three general elections, Conservative Peers argued that we were grossly overrepresented because of our weak position in the Commons. I hope, therefore, that they will now agree that, to follow their own logic, Liberal Democrats should get another 87 Peers to align us with our two parties' representation in the Commons, or that they should voluntarily reduce their numbers to 134 to bring them into line with our 80. I am particularly looking forward to hearing the view of the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, on this issue.

On Lords reform, we remain of the view that all legislatures should be elected, but we accept that this Government will not move in that direction. In the absence of fundamental reform, we welcome the plan to abolish the remaining hereditaries and to introduce a retirement age. I am, however, a bit worried that only a consultation is planned on the latter change. There is a well-known equation relating to Lords reform—namely, that reform proposals plus consultation equals inaction. We will therefore be pressing the Government for a speedy timetable for any consultation and for the resulting reform.

On these Benches, it is a great relief that we have done with the previous Administration. We believe that the present Government will have greater respect for the Nolan principles and set higher standards in public life. We believe that they have identified the key challenges facing the country but that they will need pushing to be ambitious enough to achieve their goals. That is what we will now seek to do.

4.24 pm

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Smith of Basildon)

(Lab): My Lords, I would first like to thank Their Majesties for gracing us with their presence today. I am sure the whole House will join me in wishing Her Majesty a very happy birthday.

It is a great pleasure to follow all noble Lords who have moved and supported the humble Address. This is my eighth response from the Dispatch Box—and, in a break from tradition, my first from this side of the Chamber. I have greatly appreciated the many messages I have received from across the whole House. It is a pleasure to welcome back all noble Lords for this Parliament, with a special mention to new colleagues who will take up ministerial office. Although we are not an entirely political House, many Members here were involved in the general election, sharing the highs and lows—and riding, as I am sure the noble Lord, Lord Newby, did, the Ed Davey rollercoaster of campaign emotions.

Although today is a happy occasion, I want to take a moment to remember those colleagues who are not with us today. We are fortunate that we make many friends across your Lordships' House and it is right that we remember those who have passed and retired in the previous Session. On the topic of friendship, I thank my colleagues on the Labour Benches: for the nine long years that I have led the Opposition, I have enjoyed and been sustained by their support. I give my

serious thanks to them, particularly to those who have served on our Front Bench, as Deputy Leaders and as Chief and Deputy Chief Whips.

I am sure the whole House will join me in thanking those who served in the previous Government. It is not always recognised just how demanding the work of Ministers and Whips can be, and we especially appreciated those whose courtesy and generosity of spirit, both in the Chamber and outside, was in the best traditions of public service. They allowed your Lordships' House to fulfil our responsibilities as a scrutinising and revising Chamber.

It is an honour and a privilege to be the Leader of your Lordships' House and to succeed the noble Lord, Lord True. His natural modesty and reticence probably means that he will frown at me at this point—and he is doing. He is passionate about the constitutional role of your Lordships' House, and his respect for that never dims. Having started as a special adviser in 1997, he became a Peer in 2011 and then Leader from 2022. The Leader has a dual responsibility here, to their Government and to this House, and he navigated that with thoughtfulness and consideration. Personally, I also thank him as we generally agreed on House matters, but when we did not we were able to disagree agreeably. I look forward to—I hope—maintaining that constructive relationship.

The relationship with the leadership quad of the noble Lord, Lord True, the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, and the noble Earls, Lord Howe and Lord Courtown, made the usual channels' discussions constructive and friendly. My noble friend Lord Kennedy of Southwark paid tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, at Prorogation and I add my own thanks. Throughout her time in government, she was open and engaging. I also pay tribute to the noble Earl, Lord Howe, who has so far served on the Conservative Front Bench for a record 33 years, latterly as Deputy Leader. He has many friends across this House; I hope he does not mind me saying that those of us who have been privileged to witness his acting skills all concur that the theatre's loss is Parliament's gain.

It is a great pleasure to thank the proposer and seconder of the Motion for the humble Address. My noble friend Lord Reid served in a number of positions in the Cabinet and was the first Secretary of State whom I worked for, as a Minister in Northern Ireland. That set a very high bar. Then, as today, he showed a deep political analysis, a passion for public service and affectionate humour. Like all in your Lordships' House, I greatly enjoyed some of his more colourful tales today—there are many more—although I fear I am not the only one left with a lingering image of his hotel pool encounter with Lady Olga Maitland. On a more serious note, we must listen to his warnings about extremism being alive again across Europe. He understands how history can repeat itself and is correct that it will fall on social democrats, in the widest sense, to restore faith not just in good government but in politics more broadly.

My noble friend Lady Hazarika, having already impressed with her maiden speech before the election, has trumped it with a contribution that reinforces the

star quality that she brings to our proceedings. Many noble Lords will know her as a journalist and broadcaster; I first met her when she was a special adviser in the last Labour Government and we would brief Harriet Harman for PMQs when she stood in for Gordon Brown. That was obviously great training for my noble friend's next career as a stand-up comedian. That combination of fierce political intellect, generosity of spirit and the ability to see humour in so much of her life makes her a valuable and welcome Member of your Lordships' House. Having worked on the Equality Act, she knows the transformative power of Labour Governments. She rightly raised issues relating to gender and race, and there is much more work for us to do. I look forward to her contributions.

Before turning to the content of the King's Speech, I want briefly to reflect on the work of your Lordships' House; I have had some time to think about this. The Government have a clear mandate for their programme, and have made a firm commitment to change how politics is done. I do not want to tread on the toes of the Chief Whip too early in announcing the length of the Session—it will be announced in due course—or which Bills will be coming forward, although I can tell the noble Lord, Lord True, that there will be three Bills starting in this House to be announced very soon. What I will say, however, is that it is important that we in your Lordships' House have the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way. The wide range of expertise here can benefit the scrutiny of legislation. Obviously, there was never a golden age when a Secretary of State rejoiced at Lords amendments, but in recent years sensible proposals have too often been resisted just by default. Ministers in our Government will not accept all changes but, when the House expresses a constructive view, the Government should treat that with respect.

A noble Lord: Hear, hear!

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): Praise from the Back Benches—I hope that lasts. Those of us who have championed this House know that it works best when carrying out its functions of deliberation, scrutiny and challenge, not seeking to be a replica of the other place or simply to manage business by numbers. I am encouraged and supported by the Leader of the House of Commons, Lucy Powell, who is in the same place as me and the Chief Whip on this, namely taking a whole-Parliament approach to achieving the best legislation. I am especially pleased that, for the first time since 2010, we have an Attorney-General in your Lordships' House, with a deep commitment to upholding the rule of law.

This Government will do their best to ensure that Bills are developed ahead of introduction and to recognise the value of the rules and conventions of this House. At times, urgency may be essential. I hope that on those occasions, just as we worked with the previous Government on such occasions, the Opposition will do the same with us. We will not always get things right first time, but it is our dedicated aim—and we understand our responsibility as a Government to

make it work—to ensure that both Government and Parliament benefit from the constructive consideration of legislation.

As I move on to the legislative programme, I must say that perhaps we have the balance right when one part of the Opposition is saying, “You are doing too much; how long will it take?”, and the other side is saying, “This is not enough”. I think the greatest challenge will be to re-establish the confidence in our democratic and political system and to show that it has the capacity to be a force for good. The morning after the election, in his first address in Downing Street, the Prime Minister reflected that too few people believe that the future will be better for their children. He pledged to lead a Government guided by public service and committed to national renewal. Since the pandemic, life satisfaction has declined, anxiety levels have increased, the cost of living crisis has added to a decline in living standards and the world feels more volatile than it has for many years. Driven by our mission-led approach to government, the gracious Speech set out an exciting and ambitious legislative programme to kick-start that period of national renewal and to lay the foundations for a country that is more secure and fairer, with opportunity for all.

There is no time to waste. Indeed, work has already begun. The Chancellor's announcement of a national wealth fund will unlock private investment for infrastructure projects as part of our efforts to take the country from the bottom of the international GDP tables towards the top. The King's Speech sets out a number of measures to secure economic growth. Our planning and infrastructure Bill, alongside an industrial strategy council, will get Britain building again, and through a strategic partnership with business, working people and government, we will prioritise wealth for all communities, regions and nations. British businesses and workers will take advantage of new technologies and skills, not just for a sustainable future but to improve productivity and lead the world in AI. The fiscal lock Bill will ensure that our tax and spending changes are independently considered by the Office for Budget Responsibility, to reinforce market confidence and restore public trust. Devolution and transport legislation will empower civic leaders to ensure that decision-making reflects local need and demand.

Tackling the climate emergency is not just an environmental imperative; it is also an economic opportunity. We have already scrapped the ban on onshore wind, and legislation to establish Great British Energy, alongside the Crown Estate Bill, will boost investment, expand renewable sources and bring us closer to achieving energy independence and security.

But the first duty of any Government is the safety and security of their citizens. The implementation of laws to strengthen security at public events and venues, Martyn's law, is the culmination of a campaign that followed the tragic and terrible events at Manchester Arena in 2017. I commend those campaigners. We will also work to reduce violent crimes, raise confidence in the police and the criminal justice system and drastically reduce violence against women and girls.

[BARONESS SMITH OF BASILDON]

On immigration, debate has felt too often like a political campaign tool rather than a serious determination to deal with issues. Our border security command will work with national and international partners to strengthen our borders, bring criminal people smugglers to justice and deter illegal migration to the UK.

To do this, it is essential that we harness the potential of all, regardless of background or means. We will break down the barriers to opportunity and raise education standards through the children's well-being Bill, and removing the private school exemption will fund the recruitment of more than 6,000 new teachers, improving state school pupils' access to qualified staff in core subjects. We will also do more to ensure that children attend and that they receive the mental health support that they need. We will work with businesses on a skills Bill and other initiatives, not just to grow the economy but to give young people the skills and job opportunities they need to achieve their true potential.

We will also deliver the long-overdue renters reform Bill, giving renters greater protections and ending no-fault evictions. My noble friend the Government Chief Whip will also be delighted that we will progress further reform of leasehold and commonhold, starting with important pre-legislative scrutiny.

Those who use and work in our National Health Service deserve better. Through a number of initiatives, including Bills on smoking and mental health, we will build an NHS fit for the future, reducing waiting times, providing more mental health support and improving preventative public health care.

As has already been alluded to, and as I think a few noble Lords will have noticed, the gracious Speech included a Bill to remove the remaining hereditary Peers sitting in your Lordships' House, which was intended as a temporary measure but has lasted for 25 years. I was delighted that the Leader of the Opposition had taken such great interest in our manifesto—most of the issues he spoke about were actually in the manifesto and not in this King's Speech. He made a point about consultation. I think it is helpful for us, as a House, to discuss how to move forward on these issues. That is not about delay; I think it is courtesy and consideration to ensure we get things right. When the Bill on hereditary Peers is introduced, we will have the opportunity to debate the details of it, but I want at the outset to recognise the public service of those Peers, many of whom have made an important contribution to your Lordships' House. I am told that without the strapping young hereditary Peers, we would never have won the men's tug of war competition against the House of Commons. There is a lesson there on why we lost the women's tug of war against the House of Commons.

This is the opening Session of this Parliament and for our new Government, and I am proud that this King's Speech sets out an ambitious programme for change. This is the first step in delivering the Prime Minister's promises to return politics to service and to restore people's trust in public institutions. It is a signal of our determination to enhance the UK's

reputation for fiscal responsibility, as a destination for investment and as a reliable partner on the global stage. I see it also as an important shift in attitude, with mission-led government to deliver stronger growth, healthier public services and improved opportunity for all.

Finally, as I have said, I am proud and honoured to have the dual role that I referred to earlier, of representing this House in the Cabinet and of being a member of the Government in your Lordships' House. I can assure noble Lords that I, the Chief Whip and all members of the Government here look forward to engaging with noble Lords across the House. Collectively, we have an important duty to carry out over the course of this Session. With that call to action, it gives me great pleasure to support the Motion.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow.

Senior Deputy Speaker

4.41 pm

Moved by Baroness Smith of Basildon

That Lord Gardiner of Kimble be appointed as Senior Deputy Speaker (Chairman of Committees) for this Session.

Motion agreed nemine dissente.

Stoppages in the Streets

It was ordered that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Lords to and from this House during the sitting of Parliament; or to hinder Lords in the pursuit of their parliamentary duties on the Parliamentary Estate; and that the Lady Usher of the Black Rod attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner.

Members of the House

It was ordered that a list of Members of the House, prepared by the Clerk of the Parliaments, be printed.

Hereditary Peers: By-elections

The Clerk of the Parliaments laid before the House, in accordance with Standing Order 9(4), a register of hereditary Peers (other than Peers of Ireland) who wish to stand in any by-election for membership of the House held in accordance with Section 2(4) of the House of Lords Act 1999; it was ordered that the register be published.

Oaths and Affirmations

4.42 pm

Several noble Lords took the oath or made the solemn affirmation, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

House adjourned at 4.52 pm.