



HOUSE OF COMMONS



United Kingdom

Youth Parliament
MAKING OUR MARK

United Kingdom Youth Parliament Debate

8th November 2019

House of Commons

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Friday 8 November 2019

[MR SPEAKER *IN THE CHAIR*]

10.57 am

Mr Speaker: Thank you—[*Applause.*] And there was me trying to ban clapping in the Chamber—it is not a good start for me, but there we are.

Let us enjoy today and make the best of it. Remember that this is only my second time in the Chair as Speaker of the House of Commons. Together we are going to have a great day. Before we get to the formal part of our proceedings, let me welcome you all. You have come from all over the UK, and I am really pleased to be here with you.

As I said to some of you earlier today, you are the future—I am not, but you are. You are investing in the future of our country, so please stick with it; don't give up on us. In the end, you will come back—you are testing out these seats today, but they will be your permanent place in future, because you will be part of making this our future Parliament.

I will call as many of you to speak as possible, but I will not be able to get all of you in, so do not be upset with me if you are not called. We will hear opening speeches, and then short additional speeches, and that way we can get more of you in. You might be feeling nervous, but do not worry about it. Get your first speech in this Chamber over and done with, because it will always be easier after that. Although, looking at you now, I can see that you are all professionals already, so it should be me who is worried. Let's get on with it.

Welcome to the 11th sitting of the UK Youth Parliament in the Chamber of the House of Commons. This marks the end of UK Parliament Week, an annual festival of activities that aims to build greater awareness and understanding of, and engagement with, parliamentary democracy. This year's festival has been the biggest yet, with over 11,000 organisations and 1 million people taking part across the UK.

The topics of today's five debates were chosen by over 800,000 11 to 18-year-olds who voted in the annual Make Your Mark ballot. Today, the UK Youth Parliament will choose the two issues that it wishes to take forward as priority campaigns for 2020.

At the start of the new Parliament, the Petitions Committee will launch an online petition on the UK-wide issue chosen as the priority campaign. If the petition reaches 100,000 signatures, it will be considered for debate in the House of Commons.

This year's Youth Parliament also marks the sixth year of the Paul Boskett memorial award, which was set up in memory of Paul Boskett MBE, who was one of the driving forces behind the UK Youth Parliament at the British Youth Council. British Youth Council support workers, parliamentary staff and guests have been given ballot papers to vote for the two awards: best debate lead speech and best Back-Bench contribution. The presentation of the awards will take place at a reception to be held at a later date.

Today's proceedings will be recorded but not broadcast, due to the strict rules on election coverage and the necessity of retaining the impartiality of the House of Commons during a general election. After the election period, the recording will be made available by the UK Parliament on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and on parliamentlive.tv.

I will now call the Clerk Assistant, Sarah Davies, to speak.

Sarah Davies (Clerk Assistant, House of Commons): Thank you all, and welcome to this very special place. My name is Sarah Davies; I am the Managing Director of the House of Commons Chamber and Committees Team and a member of staff of the House Service. As staff of the House Service, we are strictly politically impartial. We work with Mr Speaker, the Deputy Speakers and Members on both sides of the House. We work to provide advice, research and all aspects of logistical and digital support across the parliamentary estate, for what is actually a much wider parliamentary community.

For at least the first hour of each sitting of the House, I sit in the middle chair at the Table, where my colleague Ben is now sitting—all eyes are on you, Ben. Sitting next to Ben is Mems, who is a former Member of the Youth Parliament. That represents the many places where you can sit in this Chamber.

As Mr Speaker said, the general election has meant changes to the way we need to run this year's sitting of the Youth Parliament. Until the voting in December, there are no MPs. I am therefore standing in for the Leader of the House of Commons—that is the first time I have ever said that—in welcoming you. The political nature of the topics that you will be debating today also means that we cannot broadcast the sitting live. However, the recording will be made available on parliamentlive.tv and covered on social media once the election has taken place.

This is a very special place, and it is really great to see you all here today, as Members of the Youth Parliament, to represent your local authorities on the issues that matter to them and to you. I am really impressed that over 800,000 young people have been involved in selecting today's debate topics. By coming today and sitting here, you are bringing the voice of those young people to this Chamber and reflecting the diversity of the United Kingdom. We stress throughout Parliament Week that whoever you are, this Parliament is for you, and there are many ways in which you can have a say in what happens here.

It is easy, particularly as we talk about the general election, to think that democracy starts and ends with the act of voting, but it is much more than that. Democracy is continuous engagement. At the start of the new Parliament, an e-petition will be launched on the topic that you vote to be your priority campaign today. The outcome of that could be a change in the law on any of the issues that you are considering—abolishing hate crime, protecting the environment and so on. Today is the start of that campaign. To get that petition debated, you would need to sign it, lobby your MP about it and campaign to get those 100,000 signatures. Democracy is about ensuring that voices are heard—both yours and those of the people you represent.

I will conclude now, because it is time to start the debates. Many congratulations to each and every one of you for making the commitment to be here today and

for all your preparation and practice—the standing in front of a mirror that I am sure you have all done to get yourselves ready. It is okay to be nervous. I have been in the Chamber for many powerful speeches. Sometimes those are the ones when people slightly trip up on their words or are not quite sure. Perhaps they will be reading very carefully from their notes—that is okay—but the most powerful speeches are the ones that people make from the heart. They really matter, because those speeches show what is important to them. Keep focused on that and you will be fine. Remember that you are debating issues that 800,000 young people have deemed to be important. Enjoy it as much as you can through the nerves and make your voice heard. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: You can see that the future of this House is in good hands with a Clerk Assistant such as Sarah Davies. I thank the Doorkeepers, and the Serjeant at Arms and his department, for making a real difference. Some people will join us part-way through due to transport issues, but we will get everybody in.

Curriculum to Prepare Us for Life

11.7 am

Tom Matthews (South West): The motion is,

Schools should cover topics like finance, sex and relationship education and politics.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I congratulate you on your new role. I—and, I am sure, everyone else—wish you all the best for the years to come.

If our generation is to be serious about addressing the challenges we face of authoritarian leadership, sectarian conflicts, automation and artificial intelligence, and the decline of rational and evidence-based debate—and, perhaps most of all, if we are to do what we must do to come to a consensus about how we will stabilise the climate—we need an education system that prepares young people for the new world they will live in and puts us in the best position possible to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. The curriculum for life has been our joint most-common national campaign. Because we have prioritised the curriculum, we can now say that there are new guidelines for sex and relationships education and for physical and mental health education. That is amazing. This campaign has changed the law. As a result, the education system is more fit for purpose, but there is more work to do. The lack of political and economic education is affecting our ability to meet the challenges of the 21st century and preventing young people from making the most of their abilities.

Nelson Mandela said that education is the most powerful weapon that we can use to change the world. It is because of education that we can make meaningful contributions to political debate. There is something wrong when I go into various schools in my constituency and talk to different groups of students: they convey their views passionately and articulately, but they do not take those views outside the classroom, because they feel that they do not have the knowledge of the complexities of the issues to be taken seriously. How can it be that in our democracy there are young people who not only do not get to vote, but feel that their lack of political knowledge is preventing them from seriously participating in politics? If a lack of political education is preventing participation, surely we should do something about that.

Our fundamental role as Members of the Youth Parliament is to promote, encourage and campaign for young people's participation in politics. We should therefore campaign for a curriculum that prepares us to do that. As the scale of our challenges rises, as faith in institutions falls and as the toxicity of our politics increases, there is no more important a time than now to raise a generation of the most politically engaged citizens on the planet, equipped by the curriculum with an arsenal of skills that enables them to participate in their politics, stand up for what they believe in, hold their representatives to account and do what they can to make the difference that they want to see in the world—to stand up on the international stage for the democratic and humanitarian values that characterise our country and define our history.

If you feel the same passion and urgency that I feel, and if we are to do what we must do, I urge you, as you choose which campaign to make our national devolved campaign, to vote for a curriculum for life, so that we

can address the underlying causes of many of the issues we will debate today and be in the best position possible to address the challenges of the 21st century.

Mr Speaker: I now call Zak Bucknall from the West Midlands to oppose the motion.

Zak Bucknall (West Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Ladies and gentlemen, I strongly believe that the Youth Parliament should not prioritise a curriculum to prepare us for life. My fellow youth MPs, it is our duty to represent the young people of this great country. We strive to raise the morale of every young individual who is part of the future generation—our generation—but in doing so, we must not lose focus on how important it is to create the leaders and innovators of tomorrow. As helpful as a curriculum to prepare us for life may be to those who intend to use every part of it to their advantage, we cannot forget about the vast majority. Despite wanting to learn more about politics, economics and the other things that a curriculum for life would cover, the reality is that for a lot of young people, whether they realise it now or not, this dream of theirs could quickly become overwhelming.

A lot of young people already consider the education system to be flawed. Adding more to our already overwhelming curriculum could further increase the educational instability that Britain faces, giving the future generation—our generation—a false identity in education, resulting in the weakening of our attempts to create the leaders and innovators of tomorrow.

We must also consider the fact that there is limited space in the curriculum. If we add more content to the already overwhelming curriculum, we could risk losing subjects such as drama, music and art. Such subjects are often referred to as “less valuable”, but some of us may realise that these less valuable subjects are actually the ones that we enjoy the most and in which we feel the most relaxed at school. If we lose these subjects, a child could also be losing their dream. If that is the case, I want no part in having to tell a child that they can no longer accomplish that dream. We are trying so hard to fight the increase in mental health issues, but if we take away these subjects, it could backfire on our efforts to create a better tomorrow.

There is so much madness in this world. There are cities that need to be built and there is a world to be helped. I strongly believe that it would be more beneficial if the Youth Parliament focused its efforts on mental health and modern-day crises such as the protection of the environment. We have only one planet and one chance to save the 7.5 billion people who inhabit it. In the 17th chapter of St Luke, it was written that the kingdom of God is within man—not one man and not a group of men, but in all human beings. Therefore we, the future generation, have the power. Let the goodness that we do today define the very nature of tomorrow. Join me in voting for a different issue that will truly make a difference.

Mr Speaker: The general debate is now open. I look to Scotland to see who wishes to speak.

Ross McArthur (Scotland): A curriculum for life is a really simple concept, but what is not so simple is why it

is not already in place. Why is political, financial, sexual and health education not prioritised the same as maths, English, science and IT? Pupils are taught those wonderful academic subjects, but in many cases are not taught how to apply for a job or interview skills. It is not just more PHSE that we need to see. Schools should have more vocational subjects, too. In my own constituency a school offered much more PHSE and vocational education: Newlands Junior College, which was a success. It was based on the south side of Glasgow and was designed for young people who were lost in the education system and who had no hope for a better future. Some 92% of pupils that attended went on to a job, further education or other training. That shows it does not always have to be big out-of-the-box changes to make a difference; just a bit of common sense.

Mr Speaker: Well done. I want to call somebody from the North West.

Maddison Brookes (North West): We all go to schools and colleges every day and we expect to learn something that could impact the rest of our lives, but realistically how often does that actually happen? It is a problem. We do not get the skills we need for the future and do not learn things that can make us grow as people. We spend years in education, and the stress we put on people is unnecessary and wrong. We take exams that will not help us in our lives. *[Applause.]* We cannot carry on like this. We need to teach things that will help us. We cannot have people at the age of 16 burn out and have their mental health drop by the hour because of exams and the stress that we put on them. It does not help us in the future. We cannot let this carry on and we need your help to change this.

Mr Speaker: I now call somebody from the South West.

Henry Dean (South West): Coming from the Isles of Scilly, me and my peers have been blessed with a great education, but it is not perfect, especially the curriculum. I am sure many of the young people from across the country will agree with me. We are not taught core skills in our curriculum. Finance is a huge gap. Martin Lewis, the money-saving expert, said that as a nation,

“We have educated our youth into debt”,

but never about debt. Debt and money in general can lead to mental health problems, addiction and violence; maybe even knife crime. Voting for this motion is like a three for one offer—no; four for one, or more if we take in the wider picture of a good education. We live in a buy now, pay later culture when it was and still is the philosophy that has contributed hugely to our global environmental problems. So let us not ignore the importance of a good education and let us vote for our generation to have the best possible future!

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call someone from Wales.

Several MYPs *rose—*

Mr Speaker: My word, we have three. Where do I start? Let us go to the one in the middle.

Victor Ciunca (Wales): I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Cardiff.

A curriculum to prepare us for life has been voted constantly by young people of the UK. It has been on the Make Your Mark ballot for six years—from 2012 to 2017—and it has gained 139,344 votes this year. A curriculum to prepare us for life is one of the main issues of young people, because young people need not only to be prepared for life, but to be educated and to have the greatest general culture as well.

Focusing on skills in isolation can kill interest in any discipline. Many have been put off mathematics for life by endless tasks that do nothing to inspire them. Many have spent years grudgingly practising for music examinations only to abandon the instrument altogether once they have made the grade. The real driver of creativity is an appetite for discovery and a passion for the work itself. We want schools and their partners to inspire us and to help us to make our dreams come true. To do that, we have to work a lot and bounce back. Learning, questioning and researching are vital elements of progression, but how does education help to prepare us for failure? We need to be taught to take risks and to know that it is okay to fail sometimes. As Winston Churchill once said:

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

We can learn from mistakes more than from successes, and we can react to them if we are taught how.

Many young people ponder every day on the inevitable questions: what is your life plan; and what if you wake up tomorrow and do not have a job. We need to be supported, prepared, to not be depressed and to know what we have to do. It is said that Rome was not built in a day, but that was too long ago. We need to be able to learn and to create our own Rome, because we are tomorrow’s future. As Members of the Youth Parliament, the leading voice of young people in this country, it is not just our responsibility, but, once again, our duty to vote for a curriculum to prepare us for life.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call someone from the East Midlands.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We need to get some women standing. Come on, do not give it to the guys, because you will leave me with no choice. You must help me. Start standing.

Jack Kellas (East Midlands) Mr Speaker, you are assuming my gender. [*Laughter.*]

Mr Speaker: May I just say that the Chair is always neutral?

Jack Kellas: The reality is that most of us are here today because we are self-driven, ambitious young people receiving an exceptional amount of support and guidance from the youth workers who have brought us here today. We are engaged with, and interested in, the issues that surround us and we are active in campaigning to solve them. Unfortunately, we are anomalies. The national

curriculum has had no place in bringing us here today, yet Parliament and the Youth Parliament are an integral part of our society, as our mortgages, registering to vote and household skills such as ironing—luckily my mum is very good at that and I am not.

It is time to step away from the focus on grades and step towards producing citizens fit for society. That will not only prepare us for life, but steer us away from the mental health issues raised in other motions.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call somebody from the London region.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Look at all of them! Where do I start? The young woman in the middle, please.

Amelia Crorie (London): I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Redbridge.

I still do not know how taxes work or what they do. I have never been taught it, and most people tell me that I am too young to understand or to take it in. So, when will I be taught? Perhaps when I leave school and go into the real world, but probably not. By then I will be expected to know these things because I am old enough. A curriculum for life should be on our campaign because it helps to prepare young people to meet the challenges that they face now and those that they are yet to face as adults. That is the main purpose of school: to prepare us for the future. So why are these important lessons not being taught? In the current system that we have in place, our guardians tell us how the world works. For many people, that is not possible, and that responsibility should not be placed on parents but on teachers, as that prevents any censorship or bias. I am sure that we would all prefer if we did not step into the world outside of school blindly.

Mr Speaker: Have we got anybody from Northern Ireland? Are you from Northern Ireland? Brilliant—come on!

Anna McElhinney (Northern Ireland): I’m Anna McElhinney from East Derry. I think a curriculum for life should be our campaign because it is an issue that affects every single corner of the UK and every classroom. It also covers so many issues that are on our manifesto: teaching CPR in schools, improving the quality of sex education in schools and even mental health. Another issue that keeps coming up on the Make Your Mark ballot is votes at 16. I think we are all a bit tired of votes at 16, but one of the main oppositions to votes at 16 that I always hear is that we are not educated enough. Well, then the answer is simple: educate us!

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call somebody from the South East.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Oh my word! What representation! We have had a few women; let us go to a young man.

Ian Volkov (South East): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I would like to congratulate you on your appointment.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Ian Volkov: When delivered in partnership with communities, parents and pupils, a curriculum for life can contribute to positive outcomes for children and young people, keeping them healthy and safe, improving their academic performance, preparing them for the workplace, and building the character and resilience that they will need for the modern and changing world. Elevating the status of PSHE education will not only persuade schools in the whole education system that that subject should be at the core of learning, but it will also send a message to parents that their queries about child safety are finally being heard.

The stakes in terms of school performance in academic subjects have never been higher, and if this is not balanced by raised expectations for PSHE education, standards of education will continue to be unacceptably low in preparing us for the modern world. How many of you have sat in a citizenship lesson and wondered, “How do I file my taxes? How do I get a mortgage?” You have just sat through the constant dreary CEOP online safety lessons that you have been taught multiple times all the way from year 6. Support for a curriculum for life would be a catalyst for positive change. Headteachers, schools and others would have to respond.

The support from these groups demonstrates that the education system stands ready to respond to leadership from Government. The campaign for a curriculum for life is endorsed by pupils, parents and teachers across the country. Teachers and parents are calling for a collaboration between home and school to support pupils’ personal and social development. Finally, Youth Parliament Members, it is time to make this a priority again. I don’t like saying this, but our education is in our hands. If the decision makers cannot make an education that suits us, it is time for us to make an education that suits us. Our voices must be heard.

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call somebody from the North East. Come on!

Morgan Dobson (North East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. A curriculum for life should include sex education. As a young person, I have not been taught the true importance of consent in a place that I spend most of my time: school. Many people are seldom taught the basics. Not only am I a young person, but the LGBTQ+ community is also disadvantaged, as same-sex sex education does not exist. Supporting this motion means that every gay, bisexual, lesbian, queer and trans young person gets the help that they need in school and the support to have good sex.

Mr Speaker: Do we have anyone who wants to speak from the Army Welfare Service? If not, I will call somebody at random who is sitting on the Opposition Benches, and I am not even going to look at which region they are from. I call the young woman who has her book the highest.

Holly Leggett (South East): My name is Holly and I represent Kent. There can be no doubt that the lessons that young people are taught are outdated and unhelpful. We are expected to learn things that we would never put to practical use, which wastes valuable learning time. While previously proposed subjects, such as taxation and finances, are important for our education, what happens to the subjects that are left behind? Overlooked events in history also provide valuable life lessons, and looking at how we tackle hate crime can ensure that catastrophic events do not occur again. Reforming our education would allow students to gain perspective not just of academia but of valuable life lessons based on life as adult and on the steps taken to achieve social justice throughout history.

Mr Speaker: We come now to the winding-up speeches. I call Ricarda Rodenas.

Ricarda Rodenas (East of England): A curriculum for life has been the joint most popular campaign over the years, so is it the most important? September this year marked the beginning of sex and relationships education in schools becoming compulsory, as did the requirement for qualified teachers and a new way of teaching. That was a tremendous step towards our goal, but we are yet to see the same treatment for other aspects of this motion. The law has been changed to improve the lives of so many young people, which is an incredible incentive to keep campaigning until students achieve the education that they deserve.

Financial management, cultural awareness, social cohesion, physical and mental health, citizenship, sustainable living and even our own political system are not being taught in schools. The most crucial time in our lives is when we are preparing for our future, but we are not actually learning about real life. What is the reality of this motion? Learning about finance on a Friday afternoon will not be the most riveting lesson, meaning that students may still manage to disengage from it. But at least comments like, “How will this help us in real life?” will cease to have relevance as these skills will equip us to be functioning members of society—despite the rest of the school system letting us down.

However, we do not want to amplify the issues in our already overwhelmed system, creating educational instability and affecting our efforts to improve our education. If resources are redirected towards a curriculum for life, we could see a cut in the “less important” creative subjects. These lessons are a break in the monotonous chain and allow students to be innovative—another vital skill that schools almost set out to destroy with their industrial-age values. We are not robots in a factory. Without a creative outlet, I am sure that mental health issues will follow.

A curriculum for life is far bigger than the individual and is the solution to many more staggering issues. I am not going to scare you with the plot line of most sci-fi movies, but the rise of automation is a problem that should not be left for future generations to handle—like climate change has been thrown on to us. That is why we should be teaching the brilliant youth about sustainable living. Collective effort for change has and will always be the driving force for action.

We have a vision of a future in which the threat of global warming will feel like a distant nightmare, a

future in which the study of culture and social cohesion will destroy the concept of division and unite us as a community, and a future in which barriers to politics have been torn down by our political understanding. None the less, we must ensure that this motion does not create barriers to young people's dreams. The concept of equal opportunity needs to be reinstated without pushing our system over the edge. We cannot deny that our Youth Parliament stands for encouraging the voices of young people, so when students have lost even the ability to stand up for themselves and others, essentially because they cannot conjure up a rational debate, we need to make a change. We need a curriculum for life—it is all in the name—to secure our future and the future of this country. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Ricarda. We are now going to move on to the second debate.

Tackling Hate Crime

11.34 am

Eva Caroll (North West): The second debate will be,

We should be educated on how to report hate crime. We believe the Government should invest in creating safe spaces that promote unity in communities.

It is a privilege to speak to you all today, in the very same house that Jo Cox stood in just over three years ago. Jo was cruelly taken away from us by a crime grown from hate and ignorance of, and a lack of respect for, our fundamental values; by bitterness, intolerance and prejudice, based on no reason or experience. We must ask ourselves whether we are prepared to oppose such extreme ideologies, to confront the rhetoric that fuels them, and to tackle hate crime. I hope that the answer is yes.

Having any crime committed against you is an ordeal, but imagine being specifically targeted because of your perceived identity. Our identity is what makes us who we are, and what shapes our beliefs, passions and dreams. Imagine living in a constant state of fear: scared to wear your religious dress in public, scared to hold your partner's hand, scared to use your wheelchair on public transport, scared to run alone at night, or fearful that you will be victimised because of the colour of your skin. Sadly, this is a reality for too many young people today. The number of hate crimes reported has more than doubled since 2013, with more than 14,000 reported in the direct aftermath of the EU referendum. Tackling hate crime has made it to our House of Commons debate for the first time. Our young people are telling us that something has changed in their lives, and they need our support and solidarity, which we can offer in a UK-wide campaign.

Politicians who engage in divisive rhetoric cannot be excused from creating hostility, which trickles down into abuse on our streets. It is no coincidence that in the week following Boris Johnson's column in *The Daily Telegraph*, in which he labelled veiled Muslim women as "bank robbers" and "letterboxes", a 375% increase in Islamophobic incidents was reported. *[Applause.]* We have a responsibility to call out harmful language when we hear it, because that is the true way to tackle hate crime. As Martin Luther King said,

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

I urge you to show that love and light today as youth MPs by supporting victims.

"Hatred" is an emotive word, often associated with feelings of anger and disgust, so how can we stand by while this is applied to our fellow human beings? I believe, above all else, that humanity is a force of good; a force of kindness and strength. Today, let us show that young people are not prepared to accept hate in our country by voting for this motion, because, friends, we have far more in common than that which divides us. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: You mentioned a great MP, who tragically was robbed from this House far too early. That is the plaque on the wall for Jo Cox that her family chose, so I am pleased that you mentioned her.

Alex McGovern (South East): Many people in the UK will remember when homosexuality was illegal. Gay citizens were labelled “insane” by doctors, “predatory” by broadcasters and “criminal” by the police. As we look back at the Stonewall riots on their 50th anniversary, at a time when gay activists risked their lives in campaigning for equality at a time of lethal hostility, it is clear that although hate crime has reduced since then, it has not disappeared.

In the year of campaigning preceding the 2016 EU referendum, Home Office figures showed an enormous jump in racially motivated hate crimes, of 44%. Across the globe, we have seen deepening social divisions, with vitriolic hatred spat at those who think differently, sound different and look different from ourselves. A dangerous “us versus them” mentality has been fostered, whipping up anger, violence and even murder.

Fellow Members of the Youth Parliament, it is all too clear that hate crime is an abhorrent issue that we must abolish. However, we must consider how best to do that. There is no doubt that, without a greater focus on a holistic education system, the problems in our society will never change. Our current education system idealises grades and academia, snubbing lessons in life to focus instead solely on oxidation, octagons and onomatopoeia. We must question what we should be preparing young people in schools for—a set of arbitrary exams, or life?

Education should not simply be about cramming our minds with facts and formulas. Our current education system must be reformed, so that students no longer leave school with solely a results card, but are thoroughly prepared for adult life. In relation to hate crime, this would involve opening our eyes to countries and cultures across the world. Multiculturalism and diversity must be celebrated, so that the perspectives of young people are widened from the street on which they live to the entire globe. To truly uproot hate crime, we must use education to break the social divisions in our society, remembering that whatever our race or religion, we all bleed the same blood. If we do not reform our education system, the perpetuation of prejudice and ignorance will only cause the rifts in our society to widen.

Fellow Members of the Youth Parliament, it is all too clear that, instead of spreading ourselves thinly over many issues and achieving little, we must stand together to achieve more. Reforming our current education system will not only tackle hate crime, but will in fact energise every other campaign, because every campaign has its roots in education. From increased political education for votes at 16, to more environmental education to tackle climate change, if the Youth Parliament unites behind reforming our current education system, the campaigns will completely change and take on a new form. The choice is not hard. If we focus on reforming our education system, every campaign, and therefore every young person, will win.

However, education about hate crime will only succeed if our politicians support it, and I fear that the people who need the education most are them. [*Applause.*] It is necessary to reiterate the huge jump in abuse incidents that has been caused by Boris Johnson’s comments, which shows the impact of language in the real world. After the murder of the MP Jo Cox, we are now reverting to a political discourse that is poisoned by hostility, animosity and brutality. With antisemitism and Islamophobia rampant in our two main political

parties, it is clear that politicians must not normalise and champion the language of division and death, because it has real-world consequences. Our politicians should be saving lives, not endangering them. I plead with our MPs to stop this farce. Both their Parliament and the Youth Parliament must focus on fighting for society, not against it. A vote for tackling hate crime today means nothing without real action.

I urge all Members of the Youth Parliament to focus on reforming our education system, to create a society that is not split into tribal factions but allows everyone to co-exist together. However you define yourself—male or female, black or white, Christian or Muslim, gay or straight—we are all human, and we must never allow prejudice to get in the way of moving forward. We must stand together to create a better world. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: The general debate is now open. I am looking to call somebody from Yorkshire.

Rebecca Morgan (Yorkshire and Humber): I want everyone to look around the room. You will not find one person who is the same as you. We are all individuals of different sexes, races and sexual orientations. We are an example of the best that this country can be—a group of people who come together despite our differences, and despite what people with prejudices may put against us. As the Speaker said earlier, we are the future. By supporting this motion or the education motion, we are proving that we can all come together, and that is what this motion is about. This motion is about people, and we are here to represent the people. I urge you all to take this seriously and think, “What am I going to do to make sure we can all live together, not apart?”

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call somebody from the South East.

Farah Khan (South East): Mr Speaker and Members of the Youth Parliament, I would like to share a story with you. This story is about the intolerance, hate and fear in our society. It is about a girl from my constituency who lives in a safe and welcoming neighbourhood. It is about a girl whose grandfather fought for the British in the second world war, a girl whose father was asked where he had hidden his boat and whose mother had to change her name because she feared being discriminated against. It is about a girl who is a victim of rumours, derogatory comments and curses every single day, but who simply brushes them off. It is about a girl who has time and again been a victim of eggs being pelted at her home, a girl who has tomatoes bowled and lobbed at her house, where her family and her siblings are just trying to spend quality time together. It is a story of rocks and boulders being hurled and heaved mercilessly, smashing all the windows and all the ideas and visions of this girl. It is about a girl who wants to see the world as her oyster, yet cannot step outside her front door because she is scared of what she might encounter—what she might face.

This girl is confident, yet shattered when her windows, her car and her mind are broken with the boulders of hate, insult and insolence. This girl feels as though all those stones are supposed to strike her down, silence her and interrupt her plans. This girl should not have to feel that way. Perhaps, Members of the Youth Parliament,

you know someone like that. Perhaps you do know her. Perhaps someone does come to mind. That girl is standing in front of you right now. That girl is this girl. That girl is me.

Is it because of my race, my religion, my gender, my age or my name? I would not want anyone else to go through the same things as I have been through. We need to put this motion forward. We need to put emotions over notions. We need to put facts over fiction. Thank you, Members of the Youth Parliament.

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call somebody from the West Midlands. Young man, come on.

Haroon Irshad (West Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Hopefully you won't forget the West Midlands like you did in the last debate; we never got to speak on a curriculum for life.

Mr Speaker: Just to help you, I think the West Midlands opened the debate.

Haroon Irshad: Well, if it helps, I will deliver a great speech to make up for that. My name is Haroon Irshad and I am from the local authority of Birmingham. Assalamu alaykum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. [MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH PARLIAMENT: "Wa alaykumu s-salam warahmatullahi wabarakatuh."] Thank you very much. Saying the sacred greeting and wearing what I am now is my own choice. I am completely aware of the racist comments I will be getting, such as "picnic blanket" or "carpet", because of what I am wearing, but I am wearing the Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, attire today, because I am proud to be Muslim and proud to be Pakistani. [Applause.] I say my greeting because I am proud to be Muslim—because surely it should be our actions and words that define us. Isn't that right? [Applause.] Unfortunately, in today's society, riddled with a system still consisting of marginalisation because of our choices, it is wrong.

We get hate thrown at us, and people call it "free speech". That can lead to events such as Boris Johnson saying that niqab-wearers are bank robbers and letterboxes, which led to the "Punish a Muslim" movement. That movement was abhorrent and an absolute disgrace. That movement was completely poisonous to all of us in the Muslim community. Believe me when I say that nearly every Muslim like myself, and nearly every other Muslim in the Chamber, would have felt some fear because of a movement that was set out to perform hate crimes.

Just under half—47%—of religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims in a two-year period. I could have stood here with a suit on and fitted in with the crowd, but no. I am standing here today to deliver the message that we should not be judged on what we wear; it should be our actions and words that define us. My action is to wear this and say that we should fight the fight against hate crime. Vote for the motion to begin to suppress the marginalisation, to punish the wrongdoers for making blatantly Islamophobic or any other discriminatory comments that are hateful, and build a future that will have us all respecting others for who we are as individuals and what we do, rather than an ugly stereotype that will build a bad perception because of what just one person said. Jazakallah khair.

Mr Speaker: am now going to call somebody from Wales.

Samuel Taylor (Wales): Diolch yn fawr. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Blaenau Gwent. My friends, hate crime is on the rise. It is on the rise in several communities, and across the board. In the current political climate, which has been forged by a referendum fought on over-exaggerated issues around immigration, it is no wonder that our racial hate crime statistics have soared. How can we, as respectable members of the Youth Parliament, sit back and allow racially offensive slurs and racially motivated attacks just to happen?

Equally, despite progress, members of our LGBTQ communities still have to face discrimination on a daily basis, in particular on social media platforms. This is the third time that this motion has featured in a House of Commons debate as a result of the Make your Mark ballot. It is something that clearly we, as the UK Youth Parliament, need to address. We were elected to voice the concerns of our constituents, and 141,974 of our constituents nationally have asked us to address this issue.

It is not simply the enactment of a campaign to stop the rise in hate crime; it is a campaign to stamp it out altogether. 170,000 hate crimes go unreported in the UK every year. Hate crimes in England and Wales have doubled in the past five years, but we can make a difference. Surely that is what we are elected to do. That is why we are sat in the Chamber today: to make a difference. What better motion to support in order to make a difference?

Whether hate crimes are racially motivated, due to someone's sexuality or religion, or even down to their interests and hobbies, they are wrong. There are no other words for it: it is abhorrently wrong. Let us support the motion. Let us make a difference. Let us move forward as a united group of people, looking for, working for and finding change for the better—for the more equal and fair society that we would all like to live in. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking for the East of England. Come on—you've been waving all the way through.

Sophie Bush (East of England): I am from Essex. There exists a fine line between identity and nationalism. Identity means that we certainly accept ourselves as whoever we are; nationalism means that you have to be a certain whoever to be accepted. There is a flaw in our great nation that persists, even in these days of blossoming diversity. Some may argue that that diversity is the root of the problem, and that those who do not originate from society are made vulnerable, and consequently exploited. Nationalism is the fuel behind this fire. It generates a bubble of hate and tunnel vision, in which we do not speak for the hate but the hate speaks for us.

Although the problem manifests itself in everyday people, the real smoking gun for hate crime is the media, who have the power to destroy reputations and create damaging stereotypes that manipulate the views of their audiences. Who blatantly biases the problems we face? The media. Who uses scapegoats for the terrible actions of others? The media. The epidemic of knife crime killing our nation is blamed on young black

males. The horrific reign of terrorism is attributed entirely to Islam. Who is the gender pay gap blamed on? Women. And what does that lead to? Hate crime.

We may have lost some battles in our society, but if we stand against hate crime and vote for this motion—if we vote for the young people of the UK to have a safer future—we will not lose the war against hate crime. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call somebody from London.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: I am going to get the balance right. Go on, young man.

Theo Sergiou (London): First, congratulations, Mr Speaker. Secondly, I ask you—no, I plead with you, on behalf of the Youth Parliament and the future: if any hate crime happens in this Chamber, send them out of the door, please. [*Applause.*]

Although this issue is, unfortunately, so prominent for so many, I want to speak both personally and on behalf of my constituents about why this motion is not necessarily the best one to choose. I plead with you to make a difference, but that is all we can do. I will give you a personal example. I sat over on the opposite Benches in this Chamber last year. Afterwards, I got sent millions—well, not millions, but plenty—of pictures edited with crops of my wonky eye. Now, I had the funniest comments, which even I had a bit of a laugh at, but I also had others. It took a while to even understand what was getting through to me, and sometimes, yes, I burst into tears. I never told anybody, because all I could do was plead. There are so many barriers to changing legislation on this issue, and we have civil servants trying to work on aspects such as freedom of speech and what is classed as hate crime. All we can do is plead.

We are part of an apolitical organisation, BYC, so I know that our comments today about Boris Johnson, and even about antisemitism, probably will not be broadcast. Are you aware of that? That is the problem: we can sit here and do all the pleading, but we can never hold people to account—understandably, because we rely on their funding—so we need to tackle legislation.

Let me say something on behalf of my constituents. Year on year, I have seen the death of young people due to knife crime. Trust me, I am not taking away the importance of this issue; I hope I have proved to all that I know about knife crime. We have made so much progress in the last year in our campaign on knife crime. We have a Youth Select Committee report that is doing wonders, and we have young people involved at civil service level in making a difference and improving funding.

See, we can do that—we can change legislation—but can we change attitudes? No. In response to any comments about letterboxes, we can only plead and choose to vote in a certain way. For now, I ask you to pick a sensible motion and go properly, saving lives. In the words of Athian Akec last year, never before have so many lives been lost

“because of the indecision of so few.”

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call somebody from Scotland.

Emily Nix (Scotland): I represent West Scotland.usb Luckily, in Scotland, hate crime based on race and religion is decreasing. Obviously, that is amazing, but unfortunately, hate crime based on sexual orientation has risen since 2014. Hate crime against trans people and people with non-binary identities has risen since 2014. Hate crime against people with disabilities has risen since 2014. Threatening and abusive behaviour in terms of hate crime has also risen since 2014. We need to do something about this. We cannot just ignore it and hope it goes away; we need to try to tackle it. Everybody deserves to feel safe to leave the house. Everybody deserves to feel safe to use public transport. Everybody deserves to feel safe to exist.

Mr Speaker: I am looking for someone from the North West.

Faith Oliver (North West): In 2018-19, there were 103,379 recorded hate crime offences, which was a 10% increase on 2017-18. In 2016, there was a sharp increase—an increase of 44%—in racially and religiously motivated hate crime. I will not say why that increase happened, because I think it is very apparent what occurred that year.

I have been personally affected by hate crime on the basis of my sexuality, which has led to me being followed home, being hit with crowbars and having things thrown at me in the street. I have had to drop out of education twice, and by the age of 14, I was in my third high school. That negatively affected my mental health and restricted my ability to be myself in a public forum.

Although everybody’s experience of hate crime is different we, as the UK Youth Parliament, need to recognise the rapid increase in hate crime and how many of the young people we represent will become victims. I firmly believe that it is our duty to do something to protect the young people we represent. We need to do our best to reduce the number of young people affected by these horrific crimes.

We are a diverse group of young people, so I can guarantee that other people in this Chamber will have been affected by hate crime, or will know someone who has been. I want you to think about how you or somebody else felt in that situation. I can almost guarantee that it was a horrific feeling. I want you to tell me a legitimate justification for how you think we can allow these numbers to increase, allow the young people we represent to be victims of these horrific crimes, and allow that to affect their mental health, their ability to stay in education and their place in society.

Mr Speaker: I am looking for someone from Northern Ireland.

Niesha Kelly (Northern Ireland): Hate crime has been embedded in our everyday lives without people even realising the bigotry. It has become an endless reality without people realising how quickly it makes communities turn on each other, or that hate crime has been whitewashed

by individuals and made into a normal part of people's lives. Hate crime is deeper than a few words, or physical and emotional abuse; it is how it can be manipulated to control people.

Back home in the north of Ireland, the dinosaurs in Stormont were finally put to sleep when legalisation was eventually implemented in relation to abortion rights and same-sex marriage. [*Applause.*] Unfortunately, however, backward groups still think that it is okay to scream abuse at people going to get an abortion, or to change their profile picture to #DarkestDay, even though the north of Ireland has had much darker days in its history. It is a complete and utter hate crime against women. However, this is so widely accepted as an opinion, even though it is people's lives that are being tormented for the sake of everyone else's backward view.

To put it bluntly, hate crime is not just the stereotype of gangs creating trouble, because it is not always gangs. It can be seen in the organisations that we are meant to place our trust in—from sexist and racist politicians, to the brutality of the police and the courts. We need to switch on our minds and understand that hate crime is growing in the authorities that we are encouraged to look up to, but in fact they exploit us and those around us.

Hate crime is about understanding the difference between right and wrong, and between just and unjust, and justice is not always served, as we have seen. We need to tackle hate crime and fight exploitation by the state. Tackling it is about coming together, not tearing our communities apart.

If you want to abolish hate crime, do not place your trust in the corrupt state, which is what has caused the bigotry in the first place. Instead, place your trust in the hands of the ordinary working people.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call someone from the North East.

Tessy Idemudia (North East): I support the motion totally because I have been discriminated against because of my race, gender and ethnicity since the age of nine, in primary school. That is disgusting, but it still happens today. I am sure that many MYPs around the room agree with me and can relate to what I have been through, if not for race then for something else. To be targeted for a characteristic that you cannot change, and should never have to change, is disgusting and unacceptable. There has been an 11% increase in reported cases, so it is imperative to make sure that children—whether our age, older or younger—are educated on how to report hate crime.

We must be shown that we are accepted. Yes, I may be different, but I am here and here to stay—period. [*Applause.*] To do that, we must ensure that perpetrators are exposed and that we provide some sort of closure for victims. If you agree—if you believe that I should be accepted and you all should be accepted—please support this motion. Hate crime has no place in my society, our society or anyone's society.

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call someone from the South West.

Niall Bowen (South West): The moving stories and the abundance of anecdotes and statistics that we have heard just confirm that hate crime is abhorrent, wrong and has no place in our society. To tackle it, surely we should look at more than just a symbolic stand. We have heard the stories, and they are horrible, but we have to look at hate crime in terms of education—this point was well made by the opposer of the motion.

Hate crime happens partly because people are not educated enough. They face hardships in their lives and turn to hate crime as a means of finding a scapegoat for their problems—that is wrong. We must look at education. If we create more well-rounded and better-educated citizens, we will become more tolerant and diverse. We must look at education to tackle hate crime. If that happens, when future generations of MYPs come to this House, there will be fewer stories and statistics.

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call someone from the East Midlands.

Lauren Duguid (East Midlands): To battle hate crime, we need to change our politics. The divisive nature of the current political environment is a breeding ground for hate and intolerance. Uncaring language used by influential figures, as was mentioned earlier, only exacerbates the problem. Reported hate crime incidents have more than doubled since 2013, showing that we, as a country, have somehow decided to reject rather than celebrate our differences.

To remedy that, we should not necessarily vote for this motion, as only through effective character education at a young age can we truly help to prevent instances of hate crime. By supporting all members of society through adverse childhood experiences and by building empathy and social skills through a curriculum for life, we can work towards a kinder and more accepting world. As hate crime can perhaps be dealt with more effectively through a curriculum for life, I implore my fellow MYPs to vote for protecting the environment as our UK-wide campaign. There are no social divides on a dead planet.

Mr Speaker: I call Hanna Wittek to conclude the debate.

Hanna Wittek (South West): After a very inspiring debate, I wish to conclude on the main points that will concisely sum up what we deem to be most important, but first let us revise what hate crime actually is: a crime that a person or victim perceives as aggravated by hostility or prejudice towards another person's identity. Hate crime has destroyed people's identity, their culture and their lives. This type of crime targets an individual's most personal aspects. It completely destroys the ethos of diversity and equality that is so important in British culture and that our society has thoroughly embraced. To respect this beautiful ethos, we have to tackle hate crime.

Religiously and racially aggravated hate crime peaked after the EU referendum, and started to increase even more just after the Manchester Arena attack—the just over 3,000 incidents of hate crime that were reported rose dramatically to 6,000 after the attack. Because of a small group of impulsive individuals, others have to suffer just because of their traits. This should not be the

case in any situation. Do you really think that anyone in Britain should have to suffer such violent prejudice?

Hate crime stems from a lack of education. The lack of awareness has led people to believe that hate crime is okay and acceptable, so we should tackle the root problem: education. Respect for people's identity and culture should be embedded throughout a curriculum for life, across all schools. Education is a right in the UK, so let us make sure that the core aspects of society are taught.

The police are working incredibly hard to stop and tackle hate crime. Organisations such as Stop Hate UK have risen to the surface, and the mass movement has led to increasing awareness. Campaigns have started throughout the UK. It is important for the British Youth Council and young people to focus on the unseen problems. A campaign to reduce hate crime would allow society to be more accepting of people of multicultural backgrounds and significantly reduce the number of hate-aggravated crimes, especially among young people.

Please stand with me on this. It can be done through the raising of awareness and the introduction of policies against hate violence, and by improving education in schools. However, to be effective, the campaign would have to take multiple routes because of the difficulty in targeting difference age groups. It would have to embed all types of hate crime in respect of sexuality, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender and all other aspects.

To tackle hate crime would certainly be a challenge but, as young people, we will strive to complete this campaign. I hope you all take these important points into consideration, because it is important to make a balanced and fair choice. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker: The Youth Parliament will now consider the third motion of the day and the last of the morning session, which is on mental health. I call Beccie White to move the motion.

Mental Health

12.13 pm

Beccie White (Scotland): I speak in favour of the motion,

Services should be improved with young people's help, and should be available in schools.

It is our duty, as Members of the UK Youth Parliament, to stand up and fight for young people, and I cannot see a more important or pressing issue. We must stand up and fight for the right for every young person to have access to good mental health services.

Choosing mental health as our next national campaign will open the door to much-needed honest conversations around mental health, thereby helping to reduce the stigma. With almost nine out of 10 people who experience a mental health issue saying that stigma or discrimination has had a negative impact on their lives, and with one in four people in any given year experiencing a mental health issue, we can no longer ignore this issue. When something is openly talked about—openly discussed—it is no longer a shameful secret, which means that people can have open conversations. With our campaign, we can empower people to have these conversations and therefore to get the help that they need.

If mental health is chosen to be our campaign, we will also increase awareness and understanding of mental health. We have an opportunity today to help to banish the unhelpful narratives that perpetuate mental health myths. Comments such as “Just be happy” or “Just eat more” shut down the opportunity for an open and honest conversation. However, if we choose this as our national campaign, we have the power to eradicate these comments and increase the general public's awareness of mental health across all generations, meaning that adults can better support young people to get the help that they so desperately need and deserve.

MYPs, today we have the power to banish the stigma and negative narratives. Choosing mental health as our next national campaign shows the 10 million-plus children, young people and adults experiencing mental health issues that we care and that they deserve better. They deserve better than the unacceptably long waiting lists. They deserve better than the discrimination and prejudice that currently faces them on a daily basis. Ladies and gentlemen, we have the power to change this. They deserve better than the status quo and today we have the power to change that.

We have debated the issue of mental health time and again. While we have wasted time with inactions, the statistics have skyrocketed and the situation has worsened. There has been a 68% rise in self-harm in girls aged between 11 and 16 since 2011. The number of children and young people seeking help from child and adolescent mental health services in England has more than doubled over the past two years, but still 75% of young people experiencing a mental health issue are not receiving treatment. It is simply unacceptable.

Now is the time to act. Now is the time for mental health to be our next national campaign. We have the power to take a stand and support these young people. We have the power to reduce the ever-increasing statistics, waiting times and stigma. Chamber, we have the power. We can no longer ignore this issue and the millions of young people it affects. How can we sit here and be

content with the number of young people who are not receiving the help they so desperately need and deserve? How can we fail these young people year after year by failing to address this pressing issue?

MYPs, today I invite you to be the change that you and your constituents want to see. I invite you today to make the right decision and vote for mental health as our next national campaign. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: I call Sylvia Cullen from Yorkshire and Humber to oppose the motion.

Sylvia Cullen (Yorkshire and Humber): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Youth MPs, we are serving in times of huge uncertainty. Nationally we are in completely uncharted waters and internationally our planet's future is uncertain. Therefore, the decision facing us today is more important than ever before. It is undeniable that mental health deserves our attention. With one eighth of under-18s suffering from at least one diagnosed illness and only one quarter receiving specialist treatment, it is only fitting that the topic has appeared on the Make Your Mark ballot for so many years. However, this does not mean that it should be our priority this year.

As a Youth Parliament we have done outstanding work surrounding mental health, both locally and nationally. The progress made is undeniable. Externally, too, there has been a shift in attitude, and the conversation is very much happening. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have spearheaded a high-profile campaign to get the nation talking, with 1.5 million people speaking out as a result. We are heading in the right direction both in terms of reducing stigma and being more open. I am not suggesting that our work here is done, but the foundations have been laid, which is perhaps the most difficult part. The proposer spoke very articulately about raising awareness of mental health and reducing stigma, but I argue that there is not as big a need of this as there has been in previous years. We are moving, albeit slowly, in the right direction.

Although I completely agree that there is a crisis in youth mental health provision, and I implore those in power to act, I do not believe that we need to make mental health the No. 1 priority this year, because of the current work already happening. The conversations are happening and the stigma is reducing, so let us support this movement, but look elsewhere for our campaign.

My mum has always told me, "Don't just give me a problem; give me a solution", so I will not simply tell you why not to vote for mental health, but propose where our attention might better be focused. We have only one planet, and it is in dire straits. In the face of all this, all else fades into insignificance. We must acknowledge that the climate disaster is of greater magnitude than the mental health crisis. If we fail to do this, we fail our constituents.

Despite Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physiological needs—food, water, safety—come before our psychological needs. This does not mean that our psychological needs are not important, but that they come second to our need for a safe home. Although we must be careful not to scaremonger, we must acknowledge that, within our

lifetime, our living situations could change drastically if we do not do something about our changing climate and do it quickly.

Mental health cannot be our No. 1 priority when our planet is facing such an uncertain future. We must stand up and fight for our planet's future even if that means sacrificing very valid campaigns such as that on mental health.

Representative politics is vital for democracy. In order to try to make sure that everyone's voices are heard, I will try to sign the final part of my speech. What is clear is that our decision today is not an easy one. Mental health is a deeply personal subject to many people and therefore something that they advocate for very strongly. However, this year, we must focus on the planet. This has got to be the year of change, where we prioritise our habitat over all else. Therefore, I urge you all very strongly not to vote for mental health as your top priority, but to think of the future for your children and for your friends' children and prioritise the future of young people by voting to protect the environment. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: The general debate is now open. May I remind Members to say your name when you stand up, please? Let us have somebody from Wales.

Corey Shemwell (Wales): Congratulations, Mr Speaker, on your election.

Mental health affects every single one of us in different ways. There are many factors of mental health, including physical, mental, behavioural and emotional feelings. These may also lead to depression, anxiety, speech problems and forgetfulness.

Tackling stigma around mental health does not need big promotions or speeches; it needs talking as one, ending the agonising silence of people's problems. People need to realise that it is okay not to be okay, it is okay to be yourself, it is okay to make mistakes, and it is okay to have a bad day.

Mental health may be viewed differently by people. One of the big factors is body image, which hugely affects mental health. For example, one person in this Chamber may want to look exactly the same as a celebrity. This may then lead to that person transforming their body to fit the exact same clothes or lifestyle. An estimated one in six people have experienced a common mental disorder such as depression or anxiety in the past week. Seventy per cent of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. More than a third of UK adults have felt anxious or depressed because of concerns over their body image.

To conclude, we all need to tackle the stigma around mental health, and I believe that we should vote for this motion. Do Members agree? *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call someone from the South West.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Oh my word. I will take the nearest person to me because they are wearing the biggest poppy.

Hanna Doherty (South West): I am Member of the Youth Parliament for Cotswolds and Stroud.

Year after year, mental health has been brought before this Chamber as a priority for young people, not only as a debate topic itself, but as something at the root of other complex issues. Yes, as was so eloquently put forward by the Opposition, mental health is something that we have made a lot of progress on, and it has been Youth Parliament's campaign before, but I argue that, no, we have not yet done enough.

A mental health crisis cannot be solved without consulting young people on what changes they need and without beginning a nationwide conversation about mental health issues. This crisis is hitting those same young people across the country harder than ever. In a 2017 report, the Education Policy Institute found the lowest median waiting time for a young person to receive mental health treatment to be five days, while the highest average was 120 days. That is shocking. Fast treatment should not be a luxury for some; it is a necessity for all. If the Government's forward view plan is to deliver services to 70,000 more young people by 2020 or 2021, we, as the UK Youth Parliament, need to be holding them to account now. It is time for us to say, no, we will not just cheer up, we want real change.

Mr Speaker: Does anybody from the Army Welfare wish to speak?

Jordan Minto (British Armed Force Bases Overseas): I am Jordan Minto from Cyprus. In my situation, mental health affects me most when I know that I cannot speak to my parents about it because of the way that they have been brought up through the Army. In the armed forces, it is very common to bottle up your feelings and get over it yourself without mentioning it to anyone else, because the support is not there. When I was experiencing mental health issues, I could not turn to my father because I knew that the first thing that he would tell me to do was to suck it up and get over it because it didn't exist and wasn't bothering me. Anytime that I told him that I was stressed about my exams, my friends and my future, he told me that it did not compare to him, and that his stress was more than mine, so mine did not matter anymore.

I hope that this motion goes through, because I know that in public schools, where there are Army children, there is no support for us when our parents go out on deployment to defend this country. When our parents go away, putting their lives on the line, no one but us knows about it. [*Applause.*] Hopefully, we will be the only people who understand what it is like to watch a loved one go away to a war zone, knowing that they might not come back. We will be the only people who know what it is like to know a person or a friend whose father has been shot in the line of duty or killed in war, and who does not know how to handle it. I think that I am the only person in this room who has had to see their dad go for deployment, and I did not have support from my school when I was upset. I think that is it—thanks.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call someone from Northern Ireland.

Natasha Manganaro (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from the Strangford constituency in Northern Ireland, and my name is Natasha Manganaro. Pronounce my surname whatever way you will—I've heard every variation.

I stand before you all today to tell you from experience that bullying can have an enormous impact on someone's mental health. It can make someone feel worthless and struggle to make friends. How are we supposed to believe inspirational quotes when our heads are just swarming with the negative? You all know what I am talking about. Studies have shown that those who are being bullied may develop destructive coping strategies just to avoid their reality, such as self-harm and self-isolation.

I would like to believe that we are living in a world that has a buffet of people to help our young people who are in those situations. Sadly, however, that is not the case. We need improved and increased mental health services that are accessible and respectfully done, and so I urge you all to vote for mental health as your Youth Parliament's campaign—I know I will. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I am now looking to call somebody from the North West.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Oh my word! We have all turned out today. I will pick the young man with the red tie.

Andrew Speight (North West): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your victory. I am Andrew Speight from Blackpool. As the brain controls most activities of the human body, were it to become dysfunctional, one's life could be limited. In this tense new era, when young people are exposed to mentally harmful situations due to malicious content online, or due to unethical exams in school, or elsewhere, mental health issues are rising as a consequence.

In my constituency, we have the country's highest rate of borderline personality disorder, yet we have the fewest BPD specialists in the country. We receive the lowest levels of funding for mental health provision. That is an explicit and immoral injustice. In my constituency and undoubtedly elsewhere, there is a desperate plea for politicians to lend their support to our mental health services, which are subject to radically unfair neglect. Should we back this motion, we would provide an ever greater incentive to politicians to do just that, and end injustices such as those in Blackpool. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Can I call somebody from the West Midlands?

Amber Hiron (West Midlands): I believe that we should have mental health as one of our campaigns. In colleges, meaning 16 to 18-year-olds, we have a pretty good mental health system. We have counsellors and people around us. But I know a young lad, 13 years old, who loves his family and loves playing games and going out with his mates, but he is depressed. He has harmed himself in front of people to get attention, and what does his school do? Nothing. He has been waiting for ages to get counselling, and I think it is disgusting that

people only think about 16 to 18-year-olds when 11 to 13-year-olds probably suffer from the same things. Provision of mental health services in schools should be mandatory, because it is unfair that 11 to 13-year-olds, who are starting their GCSEs, are affected by this issue. We are focused on us, but why not focus on younger people? It is unfair when they are more disadvantaged and do not have the opportunity to go and ask for help.

Mr Speaker: I am looking to call somebody from London. Where do I start? I am going to try to get the gender balance right.

Shemar Stewart (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker. There is no doubt that there is a stigma attached to mental health issues. Although we have made progress, it is not enough. Aspersions should not be cast on someone just for having mental health issues. We need to urge our schools to tackle the stigma, to talk openly about emotional wellbeing, to educate pupils about the importance of mental health, and to implement effective support systems. We need more teachers to be trained in mental health. Not everyone has the confidence to come forward and talk about their issues, and mental health training can help teachers identify and support those who are suffering.

The link between knife crime and mental health is undeniable. By tackling stigmas and improving emotional support within schools and services such as CAMHS, those susceptible to involvement in knife crime can get the help they deserve.

Mr Speaker: Can I find somebody from the North East?

Shana McCauley (North East): I am Shana McCauley from South Tyneside. Many of you in this room may be under the illusion that mental health awareness has progressed so much that problems are now being dealt with effectively. Although I cannot deny that the stigma has been reduced and awareness has increased, so much more needs to be done to increase the standard of mental health education, awareness and services to an acceptable level.

The number of young people turning up to A&E with a mental health problem has tripled since 2010, and surely that is because young people do not know where else to go or who to speak to. That, combined with the fact that 75% of mental illnesses are established by 18 years of age, means that schools, youth services and even sports clubs need mental health first aiders, so that all young people have somebody to speak to and know where to go when they are struggling.

Every single person in this room has the power to grab this campaign and use it effectively to tackle so many of the other issues that we are debating today, and I urge you all to do that.

Mr Speaker: Can I call somebody from Scotland?

Dylan Hamilton (Scotland): I will put this quite bluntly: when I was 13, I nearly killed myself. I took a knife and I nearly slit my wrists—sorry, I probably should have said “trigger warning”. I have never said that out loud before. *[Applause.]*

I am probably not the only person in this room who this issue affects. As you may know, one in four people experience mental health problems in their life, and I know quite a few people who have faced it in their life. I also struggle with anxiety, and there is one more thing on the rise that a lot of people are beginning to struggle with, which is eco-anxiety. We are looking towards land that is currently home to billions of people being lost, which causes overwhelming anxiety. How are we supposed to focus on our education when the future might not be what we are told it will be? How are we meant to help our mental health when other people are dying? That is how I look at it.

Despite all of that, one thing that keeps me going is that I fight for the climate every day, because I have to fight for other people. That is what helped me the most with my mental health. I joined the school strike for the climate movement, which is the best thing I have ever done for my mental health. It has helped my eco-anxiety and my overall anxiety: before, I would panic standing in front of a classroom, but then I did a speech to 20,000 people in Edinburgh. This is crucial to our mental health epidemic. Tons of people have said that it has helped them with their depression and anxiety, so as important as mental health is, I would say that it is extremely linked to the climate crisis, and I urge you to vote for “Protect the Environment”.

Anna McGovern (South East): I represent Medway. If you broke your arm or leg, you would seek professional help, so why should this be any different for mental health? Mental health is the largest cause of the burden of disease in the UK. One in four people experience mental health issues each year, and 676 million people are affected by them worldwide. It is time to start treating mental health on the same level as physical health, but sadly, that is not happening. Right now, 75% of young people with a mental health problem are not receiving treatment, and the average waiting time for effective treatment is 10 years. It is only when young people reach a crisis point that they might begin to receive some help. Clearly, you would not have to wait a decade to receive treatment on your broken body part, so why should mental health be regarded any differently? With suicide being the leading cause of death in young people across the UK, we must use this platform to make a difference to those who struggle with mental illness every day. Make your vote count.

Mr Speaker: I have to say, that is the trendiest jacket I have seen in this Chamber.

Arqam Al-Hadeed (Yorkshire and Humber): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mental health is a motion that we have debated time and time again, and a campaign that we have dedicated a lot of work towards. Why? Because we care about the future of this country, and about the future of the young people of this country. That is why I want to speak on a motion that I believe affects us the most, yet we do not know about: the issue of Kashmir.

Over 100,000 people have been killed, women have been raped, and children have been blinded by the cruel and inhumane use of pellet guns. MYPs, you might be sitting there rightly thinking, “That has nothing to do with my future. That has nothing to do with this country.”

Well, let me inform you: the issue of Kashmir has got to a point where both nuclear-equipped neighbouring countries—Pakistan and India—are talking about a potential nuclear war, and that war will be the deadliest one ever witnessed by the human race, the effects of which will be faced around the world. I do not want you to think for a second that I am exaggerating the situation. These are not my assumptions. These are the statements made by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, in his speech in front of world leaders just last month at the United Nations.

MYPs, I urge you to stand with Kashmir and the Kashmiris not because it might have a devastating effect on this country or your future, but because we live in a country that is built on the notions of self-respect, individual liberty, tolerance and, most importantly, democracy. Why, when over 8 million Kashmiris are imprisoned in their own homes and cannot leave to get medical attention or education, do we stay silent? Why, when the right of self-determination is stripped from the people of Kashmir, do we stay silent? We live in a country that does not just follow human rights but promotes them around the globe. I urge everybody to stand up and speak up. That is when we will have freedom and protect our environment and this planet.

Mr Speaker: I am going to call someone from the East Midlands.

Ellie-May Eardley (East Midlands): Today we have the power to make mental health our main priority. Why should we vote against the environment? Yes, the environment will affect us and other young people, but mental health affects each and every one of us here in some way. We can stand here and say that we will do something, but that is not enough.

Will Pope (South East): A study found that 75% of mental illnesses start before a child's 18th birthday, and that figure keeps rising. Mental health does not always show on the outside. It is on the inside, and it grows like a tumour, getting bigger every day. My friend experienced anxiety and depression a few years ago. They tried to tell their friends how they were feeling, but they were told that they did not have it, because they were laughing and having fun. They decided that they were being stupid and let it grow for another two years, before finally it got too much and they told someone, who talked to them and got them sessions with the school counsellor. Bad mental health does not mean that you are constantly in tears or scared of everything. You can be the happiest person in the world on the outside but feel horrible on the inside. If someone says that they think they have mental health issues, talk to them, be kind to them and get them help. Who knows? You could end up saving a life.

I agree that waiting times for school counsellors need to be shorter, and more awareness needs to be raised. However, should we vote for this as our campaign? While this is a massive issue, I feel that our attention would be better focused on an issue such as the environment. We need to tackle environmental issues before it is too late. The environment was voted No. 1 in my constituency. Should we not focus on our planet before we focus on anything else?

Mr Speaker: I am now going to call Luke Patterson to conclude the debate.

Luke Patterson (Northern Ireland): Every single person in this Chamber is passionate about improving the lives of young people. That is very clear from our commitment, determination and perseverance in our role as MYPs, and especially in the run-up to Make Your Mark. As a young person, both my head and my heart tell me that I should vote for mental health to become our devolved campaign. It is a no-brainer that the Governments across these isles should implement better mental health services for all young people, no matter their age, where they live or whether they have a disability. As we have heard so eloquently in the debate, mental health is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, issue affecting young people today—or is it? The results of our Make Your Mark ballot show that double the number of young people voted to protect the environment over mental health, and 95,000 more to end knife crime. MYPs, if our campaigns were decided purely on the Make Your Mark results, those two would have been selected. However, the strength of the contributions from Members across the House shows that mental health deserves to become our devolved campaign.

Mental health achieved more than 43% of the vote in Northern Ireland's Make Your Mark ballot. That is not surprising when you take into account the epidemic of mental health issues that is alive in Northern Ireland. A survey found that nearly half of young people say that they have faced mental health issues, and that one third would go as far as saying that they feel hopeless. What sort of country are we living in when these numbers are growing day by day? Young people are being failed day in, day out, and the Democratic Unionist party and Sinn Féin refuse to form an Executive. The young people of Northern Ireland are sick and tired of their petty, party political and outdated sectarian politics, which has held us back for decades. *[Applause.]*

It is the case that 70% of young people receiving mental health treatment have not received early enough interventions. It is clear that this Youth Parliament urges the Government to do something about that, to ensure that they capitalise fully on the opportunity to make a real impact and improvement in the lives of those who have faced adversity in childhood. It is clear what needs to be done.

If this Youth Parliament selected mental health as our devolved campaign, we would be able to challenge and educate decision makers on the issues and problems that young people face when trying to access, and when receiving, mental health services. As the proposing speaker said, we would be able to tackle the stigma surrounding mental health issues and further encourage young people to open up about what they are feeling.

MYPs, the decision is in our hands. Let's make the decision wisely.

Mr Speaker: I thank all who have contributed and I apologise to those who wished to speak but have not got in. We are running slightly over time, but I want to thank the two Clerks in front of me. I think you will agree that they have kept their eye—*[Applause.]*

The other thing I want to say is that I was worried about democracy, but I do not need to worry now. Just

make sure that you pick out the seat that you want in the future, because the future is here and we will make sure that the best debates are taken forward.

This has been really good for me. I think it has been exciting and I hope it has been exciting for you. We are going to have a photograph taken in a minute; I will just close the proceedings for this morning. Wherever you have come from, thank you for turning up. Thank you for having such a strong voice, and make sure that that voice continues to be heard. MPs need to hear from you. Go and see them; go and let them know what your views are. That is what people are elected for—to listen and take on board what people say.

We are going to have a bit of a laugh in a minute—we are going to see the photographer try to climb up some steps. I will just officially close the morning sitting. This concludes the morning sitting of our proceedings. As I have said, I will not be here for the afternoon sitting, but you will be in very capable hands, because Dame Eleanor Laing is going to take over from me.

12.48 pm

Sitting suspended.

Knife Crime

[DAME ELEANOR LAING *in the Chair*]

1.43 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Good afternoon everyone—[*Applause.*] Order. Oh, you are beautifully well behaved. You have no idea how much better you are than the normal lot we have in here, but I am sure we will see many of you here in your own right in due course. It is a very great pleasure to see you all here this afternoon and—[*Interruption.*] Oh, yes. That is the rule: as the Head Doorkeeper has just said, when the occupant of the Chair is on their feet, you have to sit down. We have to tell the normal MPs that as well.

It is wonderful to see you all here this afternoon. So often the media and commentators complain that young people do not pay enough attention to politics. In my experience, it is exactly the opposite. Your generation has a tremendous sense of duty, and an understanding of, and involvement in, public affairs. It is those who are older than you who do not do their duty. You are all doing an absolutely terrific job, so let's get on with the session.

The Youth Parliament will now consider the fourth motion of the day, on putting an end to knife crime. I call Elia Yousf to move the motion—[*Applause.*] Order. Give the man a chance!

1.45 pm

Elia Yousf (London): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I speak in favour of the motion,

Too many young people's lives are lost to knife crime; the Government need to do more to help end the knife crime epidemic.

My friends, enough is enough. Too many in our communities have fallen to the crippling plague of knife crime erupting across our cities, too many of our constituents have been mercilessly wrenched away from both their families and their lives, and too many of our politicians are standing idly by, ignoring the plight of thousands of young people living in fear for their lives. As the voice of young people, we can no longer allow their anguish to go unheard and uncared for by a political elite unaffected by the torment we face daily in our very own communities.

The idea that knife crime in the UK is some sort of distant problem is, unfortunately, a wishful myth. In the 12 months to June 2019, there had already been 235 murders using knives. Furthermore, knife crime is becoming an ever-more potent issue for young people. There has been a 93% increase in under-16s admitted to hospital due to knife attacks.

My friends, those figures are a terrifying reminder to us that we cannot be ignorant to the emerging lure of knives, which seduce those whom this Government have neglected in the past. This Government have slashed youth services, diminished mental health support and taken thousands of police officers off our streets. That has allowed crime to flourish, leaving our young people unprotected. The concerning lack of opportunity for young people in Britain has merely fuelled this epidemic, as youths across this country turn to other means of achieving economic stability, or merely find companionship among members of their gang.

The truth of the matter is that those who carry knives do so due to a multitude of factors, including a lack of trust in the police, austerity, the media and gangs, yet also a desolate culture that has isolated young people, pushing them to crime. Young people feel that they are no longer defined by their achievements, but by the postcode they live in. This mentality has gone too far. In order to make any lasting impact, we must reignite the flame of success and ambition that thrives within our people, reminding them of their potential outside a life on the knife's edge.

We must stand together, my friends, to fight the terror of knife crime piercing our livelihoods and puncturing our futures. That is why this speech is an appeal not only to Westminster, but to the millions of young people living among us who have felt the true angst caused by knife crime. If any vulnerable young people are watching today, I ask you—I beg of you—to save a life and surrender your knife. *[Applause.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are going to have to do something about this clapping business. It is absolutely great to clap, and that was a great speech, but if you take up all the time clapping, lots of people will not get a chance to speak. We will have little claps; would that be okay? I now call Davinia O'Muyiwa, who will speak on behalf of the South East.

Davinia O'Muyiwa (South East): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Knife crime—two words that strike a nerve in everybody here. The knife epidemic has touched each and every one of us. It rips families apart, makes our streets dangerous and takes our loved ones.

Now, the question I ask myself is, "How can I possibly urge you to vote against this motion?" Well, knife crime is a mountainous issue, as it stems from gang crime, poverty, lack of opportunity, inequality, austerity leading to toxic environments, and much more. However, a profound issue aiding the knife epidemic is a lack of education—something so simple, which gives someone a glimmer of hope of change, and a chance to do better than those before them. Education has a greater influence than any of us can imagine. It gives someone the ability to change. It gives them the ability to end the misconception that carrying a knife will make them safe, entitled and protected.

We could look at the reasons why young people feel pressured to carry knives. Young people feel compelled to carry a knife in order to arm themselves against a rival. The sole reason is that they want to feel superior to others, as someone else could also be carrying a knife, and they want to be respected, or even feared, by their peers. There are many more reasons.

Education alone might appear to address the complexity of knife crime. However, the obstacle is much bigger than a PSHE lesson in school, because most of us here know that they do not work—they are seen by young people as too boring, not relevant, or simply just an effort. And what about the child who is not suited to the classroom?

How do we tackle this? It is a complex issue that requires a significant approach. The rate of permanent exclusions in the most deprived 10% of schools is

double that in the least deprived, which demonstrates how little education can have an impact on knife crime.

Everyone here agrees that knife crime is a crippling issue. In Essex alone, 11,033 people voted to make knife crime the subject of our campaign. However, if we use education to prevent knife crime, we will hit massive barriers that are time consuming, making it harder for us to reach our end goal. There is little consensus on the driving force behind the knife epidemic, which means that multiple issues that fuel the crisis have to be addressed: a decline in the number of police officers on the streets; young people constantly having to move from home to home; issues with law enforcement; and knife crime not being treated as a health issue. All those issues act as a catalyst to the addled belief that carrying, using or turning to a knife is a good idea.

Knife crime is a significant issue, but perhaps it is too much to take on. I ask you this: are we biting off more than we can chew? Can we, as the Youth Parliament, address this in one year? We are all affected by knife crime, however big or small those effects may be. A plethora of deep-rooted causes have led to the increase in knife crime. Although I believe in a campaign on knife crime, I believe that for us to try to tackle this issue, which has caused vast pain to our constituents, would be immense.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Do I see someone from the South West who wants to contribute?

Shakur Grant (South West): Being brought from the heavens just to be dropped into the depths of the ocean, and to be brought up by a mother just to see another one burying her child—mothers should not be burying their children; their children should be burying them.

Knife crime is arguably the biggest epidemic in modern Britain, other than the notorious Brexit. It has caused not only pain across the UK, but controversy. Stop-and-search is the main controversy. They are not there to help half the time. Being a young black boy, I cannot appreciate the number of times I have been stopped and searched, without even a receipt, and I have been asked not to make a recording. It is just a bother for many of us.

There needs to be more intervention. For example, the Government need to have focus groups for those who were put in such situations on estates where they feel they had nowhere else to go. More than 600 youth centres have been closed across the UK, which is absolutely ridiculous, so they need to be reopened. Those closures mean that there is no place for young people to go after school; the only place they can go to is the society they have lived in and been brought up in.

There also need to be drop-in boxes to allow those people who might be about to make the wrong choice to actually put down their knife and think about the situation they are about to put themselves in, because sometimes we young people do not know what consequences will follow our actions. Many more issues follow from that, and they cause a social impact.

There are teens bleeding and dying, and there are mothers crying, and there is no support for them, whether for their health and wellbeing, or for their mental state. People around me and many other young people are hurting because the people around them are

hurting. In Bristol, there were three stabbings in three days, which is a ridiculous number. I believe that we need to do something about it. I have said it once and I will say it again: we need to make sure that there is support and not sorrow for these hurt people—the people who are in such pain. Fear is the cause, not their anger and their rage, and the Government need to realise that racial judgment is not going to solve this problem; help will solve this problem. I hope that you vote before it is too late.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Do I see someone from Wales?

Charitha Garadannagari (Wales): Let us end this knife crime epidemic and other related forms of gang violence by calling on the Government to make greater investment in communities, poverty, education and youth services. Across Wales, we have seen community centres closed, or kept open on a shoestring by the unsung heroes who volunteer their time and effort so that young people can engage in positive interests and activities.

We have felt the impact of cuts to youth services across the UK, with a devastating effect on many vulnerable young people who need strong role models in their lives. Many young people living in poverty cannot afford to pay for the leisure and recreation activities that their more affluent peers enjoy. Let's break down the barriers between the police and young people, and invest in intergenerational projects and volunteering opportunities. Too many lives are lost to knife crime, and I say that the Government can do much more to help.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there someone from Northern Ireland?

Jodie Floyd (Northern Ireland): I am on the Youth Select Committee for knife crime, and I believe it is an incredibly important issue, especially in Northern Ireland because of problems such as arranged fights on the streets, with children as young as 12 coming with knives to fight other children, and the murder of a Belfast man, who was on his way home from church and was stabbed to death in the middle of the road. However, this was the Youth Parliament's campaign last year. It is time for actual action from the Government; it is not just for us as a Youth Parliament to stand here and debate it year after year.

Madam Deputy Speaker: What about the North West?

Ben Lomas (North West) *rose*—

Milo Dwyer (North West) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let's have this gentleman first, and then I will come to you. I am sorry I cannot call you by name, it is impossible.

Ben Lomas (North West): Over the last five years, knife crime has nearly doubled, increasing every year to the point where 43,516 knife crime offences took place in the 12 months leading up to March 2019. That means that, on average, there were 119 knife-related incidents a day, with young people badly affected. In my constituency of St Helens, 2,264 people voted to tackle knife crime in

the recent Make Your Mark ballot. Nationally, 291,199 young people voted to tackle knife crime, making it the most voted for devolved topic.

It is simply unthinkable that this crisis has escalated so rapidly, and that there are young people across the country who are afraid of their own or other communities and fear that they may be stabbed or attacked. There will be those who say that nothing can be done to prevent knife crime because it is an unpreventable norm of society that young people must deal with. Members of the Youth Parliament, this ill-founded logic must be dispelled. To elicit the change required, we need to address the root causes of knife crime. Rather than focusing on outdated prevention methods such as the controversial stop-and-search system, which destroys trust between young people and the police, we need longer term solutions, not quick fixes.

We need more education for young people who are at risk of becoming involved in violence, or who may be inclined to turn to a knife, so that young people are supported to make better decisions. We need to ensure that politicians from across the political divide implement a comprehensive and fully resourced anti-poverty strategy so that young people do not feel that they and their communities have been fundamentally let down, raising the likelihood of their turning to violent measures. On top of that, we need to ensure that people everywhere understand that this is not, and should not be, tolerated in our society.

The Youth Parliament has played a pivotal role in bringing about pioneering change for young people. As we look to the future, that needs to continue on pertinent issues such as this. The struggles of today develop the strengths of tomorrow. We are gifted now with the opportunity to make tackling knife crime our campaign for the year. Please vote to ensure that no more innocent young lives are lost on our streets.

Madam Deputy Speaker: There is a lot of support for that position from that part of the Chamber. We will now hear from Scotland.

Ross Gibb (Scotland): I am fortunate that my home area of Aberdeenshire has relatively low levels of crime. My modern studies teacher, Mrs O'Reilly, taught me a good philosophy in respect of the labelling theory: if you tell somebody of a certain ethnicity that they are more likely to commit knife crime, it will have an effect. People start to think, "I'm being told this every day in the media—I am hearing it all the time; is it true?" It reaches the point where they start to believe it. If you hear something enough, you begin to believe it. That is why we need to stop rationalising this in the media. We need to make the point that we need to fix it, rather than just pointing our fingers and saying, "Well, it's this group of people who are doing it, so let's stop and search them all the time." There are ways and means, but stop and search is absolutely not one of them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let us hear from someone from the North West—the gentleman in the green jumper whom I almost called earlier.

Milo Dwyer (North West): If knife crime was a disease, it would be considered a health crisis—an epidemic, if

you will. I am sure I am not the only one in the Chamber who has witnessed people either being stabbed or being caught with knives close to their homes, in their very communities. I have seen people tackled to the ground outside my home because they were carrying a knife.

When you strip away youth services, you strip away opportunity and you strip away ambition from young people. As well as being a young person, I work in a couple of youth centres in my local community, and we have seen the effects of the stripping back of youth services. We have also seen the wonderful effects that youth services can have on the reduction of knife crime and other antisocial behaviours in our local area. I urge you all to vote for putting an end to knife crime, so that we can campaign for adequate funding for youth services and other provisions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Who do we have in the middle? Let us hear from someone from the West Midlands.

Mahfuza Khandokar (West Midlands): Knife crime is an epidemic that is obviously on the rise. It is an issue that is heavily covered by news outlets and that we hear about on a daily basis, but even so, there is very little coverage compared with the magnitude of the problem. I believe that knife crime is the issue that we should back today because, as well as it being an immense issue in and of itself, it relates to several of the other issues we have discussed today. The stigma attached to knife crime is commonly associated with certain groups of people, such as those of a specific ethnicity or race, and this can contribute to certain forms of hate crime.

As you may know, we voted on the same motion last year, and in Birmingham we have seen some positive effects from the vote for that motion and from our campaigning. One thing we have done in Birmingham in the past year is to implement the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme, which we took from Scotland. The programme aims to prevent a variety of forms of violence—such as sexual harassment, rape, assault and knife crime, along with many others—by educating young people using the active bystander method, which is known not only to contribute to reducing the number of young people getting involved in knife crime, but to reduce isolation among young people, which is known to be a common contributing factor to a lot of mental health issues.

The MVP programme also teaches life skills to young people, providing a form of curriculum for life, another issue that we have discussed in the Chamber today. This motion backs every single motion that we have discussed so far, while tackling a massive issue in itself. That is why I believe we should back this motion today.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am looking at the London region. I call the MYP for Hammersmith and Fulham, Ozan Erder.

Ozan Erder (London): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Year after year, knife crime has continued to rise across the UK. Year after year, reports have been published and promises made, but too little has changed. In London alone, in the year up to March 2019, there were

14,800 reported offences involving a knife, with 474 in my borough alone. That is more than one every day. The Government's decision to tackle knife crime by adopting a public health strategy is a positive step: one that many of us have campaigned for. It has worked successfully in areas in the past, but the Government have failed to deliver on this promise and have failed to put forward funding and credible proposals in order to adopt this approach.

Youth services have seen funding cuts of almost half a billion pounds since 2010, and there is no indication that these will be reversed any time soon. Additionally, we must not ignore the role that a spike in child poverty and a decade of austerity have had in creating the social conditions in which the epidemic has emerged. Too many young people have been deprived of the opportunities to build themselves a brighter future and to strive to achieve their passions. Too many have been deprived of basic living standards, which should not happen in this day and age.

Knife crime received the most votes in Make Your Mark last year, and it received the most votes for a devolved issue in Make Your Mark this year, which shows the importance that young people placed on it. As the Youth Parliament, we must act. Only by making it our national campaign will we be able to make a difference. Only by continuing to work together, as we have done over the past year, will we be able to eradicate the disease in our communities that is knife crime.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I want to hear from the East of England. I call you, sir.

Isaac Codjoe (East of England): Last year there were over 40,000 incidents of knife crime nationwide. This must stop. This year, just under 300,000 young people voted for us to debate this topic. We, the young people of this nation, are calling out. It is about time that the voices of the voiceless were heard. Our young people should not leave their houses in fear, armed with knives in preparation to respond to violence with violence. Instead, our young people should leave their homes armed with the knowledge that they can become the doctors, lawyers, politicians and community leaders of our futures, armed with the knowledge that the state cares for them and for their safety.

More must be done to assist those in affected areas through charities such as the Tavlife organisation. More must be done to nurture young people through equal opportunity. More must be done to help families cope with poor education and poverty. So, too, more must be done to help understand why young people choose a dangerous lifestyle rather than demonising them. But it cannot stop here. This plague of violence, terror and abuse on our streets cannot be cured solely by the work of schools and philanthropists, for no man is an island. It is down to us, the community, in addition to the Government, to support the eradication of knife crime. Every man is a piece of the continent. We must oppose violence and aggression with peace and a sense of belonging for those who are marginalised. Therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. I urge you all—MYPs, community leaders, parents, anyone in a position of power, and all you gathered here today—to encourage our young people to drop the

weapons of destruction, and, alternatively, hand them the tools of construction: education, opportunity, and a future.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Who do we have from the South East?

Several MYPs rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The lady in the black and white. *[Interruption.]* I am so sorry, you are both wearing black and white. I will take that lady first, and then come to the other lady later. I remind you to say your names, as we need to have a note of them. Will you say your name and where you are from, please.

Lilian Nunoo (South East): My name is Lilian and I am from the South East.

Sorry, I am so nervous right now. *[Cheers and applause.]* I have seen the tragic effect of knife crime on a number of people—on friends and family. I remember watching my uncle's blood-drenched clothes twisting and turning in the washing machine. You can wash away blood, but you cannot wash away the effects of knife crime. So many children have died. How many more need to die for us to wake up and realise that that is not okay? Those people are like you and me—at least they were. By stopping this epidemic, we will be saving people.

In my county, county lines is spreading like an uncontrollable disease. Young children are being sent into cities unfamiliar to them to transport drugs, and we are acting as if that is okay. The Government are putting money into stop and search. What statistics show that such methods actually work? These people must get the help they need. It is not okay to take someone else's life. These families who cannot afford things are paying money to have funerals—things they cannot afford. We think that this is okay. We have statistics and we have numbers. We know that tens of thousands of people are dying every single year, and we are okay with it. I am not okay with it. You guys should not be okay with it. These are youths just like you and me. They are just like us: they are our neighbours; they are next door. Where are they now? They are buried beneath us. I urge Members to vote for this motion, because this is what really matters. All these motions that we are voting on matter, but I am telling you guys that we are talking about people's lives—they are dying. We need to vote for this motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you. We are almost at the end of this topic, but I will take one more speech from each side. I call the gentleman at the back.

Cameron Hodds (East of England): I am a Member of the Youth Parliament for East Norfolk.

So many people here today are talking about knife crime in big cities such as London, Leeds and Bristol. I understand that it is such an epidemic and such an issue in these big places, but there are so many smaller towns, such as Great Yarmouth where I come from, that are deeply affected by this, too. I was on the *Great Yarmouth Mercury* website and found that when the key word "knife" is searched, there are 15 reports of a knife crime

being committed in 2018. That may not sound like a lot, but Great Yarmouth is a very small town.

One report was released on 15 February 2018 that stated that 16 knife crimes had been committed in just four weeks. Now, I am not very good at maths, so it took me a while to figure this out—that is four knife crimes a week. I understand that that may not sound a lot to those of you from larger areas—I understand that you will have higher statistics—but this is a horrifyingly high statistic for a town that has never experienced anything like this before, at least not on this scale. Knife crime, like any crime, can be expected anywhere. Unfortunately, we will never live in a completely crime-free world.

However, as a pressure group, we need to push for a crackdown on the crimes that leave people aged 11 to 18—all ages, in fact—in critical condition in hospitals, and target those over petty crimes.

It has been calculated that 30 knife crimes have been committed in the Great Yarmouth borough alone in one year. In such a small town, that is horrendous. What does this mean for our entire nation? How many people need to be seriously or even fatally injured for something to change and be put in place to prevent knife crime? We need to protect our nation from the knife-crime epidemic. We have a big choice to make here. Like a 2017 MYP for the West Midlands rightly said, but in reference to the protection of the LGBT community, I would give up my right to vote at 16 to ensure that young people could live without fear of being stabbed or attacked. Please vote to save our nation from weaponry, to ensure that we can walk down the street without constantly looking over our shoulders, and to stop knife crime.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The lady who I was going to call earlier—would you give your name, please?

Shanté Jackson (South East): I am Shanté Jackson and my constituency is Southampton. A month ago, on October 10, we lost two young lives to knife crime in the space of five hours. This is an epidemic spreading through our country and we cannot afford to lose any more lives. Last year, we vowed to try to reduce knife crime, but the truth is that one year is simply not enough. The 292,470 young people who again voted for knife crime as their devolved topic this year proves that. It is clear that we cannot give up this fight. This is a desperate cry for help from the young people in our country, who see their friends hurt and devastation on the news. How can we vow to change the lives of young people if their place in society is not protected? I have to stress that the ending of knife crime is not in stop-and-search powers, which unfairly target our black and Asian communities, but in community centre funding, job opportunities and a change in school exclusion policies. I beg you all to choose knife crime as your national campaign, not just for yourself, your friends or your families, but for our future—a safer one.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Now, to conclude this debate, I call Jack Heald from the East Midlands.

Jack Heald (East Midlands): I begin, Madam Deputy Speaker, by commending the efforts of my fellow Members of Youth Parliament, both on the quality of their

speeches and on their hard work throughout the past year, while working on our campaign to tackle the scourge of knife crime. They have appeared on television and radio, and have engaged with councillors, MPs and Ministers. I am sure that we all anticipate the publishing of the Youth Select Committee report in the new year.

It is also fair to welcome the Government's commitment to adopt a public health approach to youth violence. That will include 20,000 new police officers and the introduction of a youth endowment fund. It is incontrovertible that our politicians now accept that this crisis must be tackled, which is undoubtedly something that the new Parliament will address. We must be acutely aware of that when determining our next campaign.

However, as a Parliament, we are still able to direct the course of policy. We still find ourselves reacting to this crisis, rather than proactively remedying its root causes. As long as young people live in fear to go out into our communities or are enticed into crime to keep their families above the poverty line, the crisis has not abated. Our Parliament must be unequivocal: we must be tough on crime, but tougher on the causes of crime.

Let us be radical and bold in our solutions. Let us give our constituents somewhere to go, by making youth services a statutory provision. It is no coincidence that the areas that have suffered most from youth service cuts have also seen the largest increases in knife crime. Let us give our youth workers the resources that they need to do their jobs and help us. Let us end the racial stigmatisation within stop-and-search, bringing our communities together rather than ripping them apart. It is manifestly unjust to infringe the civil liberties of some with quick knee-jerk reactions.

Let us give our services longer-term funding cycles, strengthen restorative justice, and give schools a chance to solve the scandal of the rate of school exclusions. Let

us declare war not on drill music but on poverty, isolationism and the opportunities gap—the true root causes of the burning injustices in today's society. We cannot patch up the dam once it has burst. It must be rebuilt, like our communities. Now more than ever, our communities must develop as safe spaces. Whether we are tackling the mental health crisis or a rise in hate crime, we must be aware that our communities are at the heart of the result that we wish to achieve.

We must tackle the poverty of hope that is systemic in our communities. We sing about a "Land of Hope and Glory" but there is no glory where there is no hope. Opportunity offers no hope when it is afforded to a few; it is solely privilege extended. That speaks to the root causes of all our campaigns: saying to young people, "You will rise to your potential not because of your background but because of your talent." This is undoubtedly a behemoth of a task, but the fights that seem unwinnable are the only fights that we must be willing to fight as a Youth Parliament. Regardless of the campaign we choose, we must take courage in our convictions, delivering on our constituents' mandate. If we cannot tackle these issues, what are we doing here?

Let us reflect on the 235 deaths in the year to June 2019. Our constituents—some as young 13 and many just in the wrong place at the wrong time—have paid the ultimate price for our country's collective failure to act. We must act now. Let us commit ourselves, through whatever campaign we choose, to create a better United Kingdom, a more equal Union of nations, and a country that gives us all hope and therefore glory.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That was an excellent ending to an excellent debate. Very well done to everyone who took part. We will move swiftly on to the fifth and final motion of the day, because I appreciate that many of you still want the chance to speak.

Protecting the Environment

2.22 pm

Connor Clarke (Wales): The last debate will be,

We believe that we have a responsibility to protect the environment from the effects of climate change for the next generation; and that the Government should look towards carbon neutral alternatives.

Diolch yn fawr iawn—thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Two plus two is four, my tie is red, these Benches are green, and tomato is the best soup. Those are some undeniable facts but, if you will allow me to add a few more, climate change is real, climate change is a threat, and we are already seeing the consequences. I am not using hyperbole when I say that 2050 is too late. I am not using hyperbole when I say that the price of inaction is a cost that is greater than myself, greater than this Youth Parliament and greater than our generation.

According to young people from most of our constituencies across the UK, climate change is the No. 1 issue facing us as human beings and, as a human being, I see that we need a revolution—a revolution from the ground up, a revolution of the grassroots, a revolution of young people, old people and everyone in between, in which the revolutionaries are carrying not torches and pitchforks but picket signs. We need a green revolution, Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*] Madam Deputy Speaker, apologies. I practised this 50 times in front of the mirror.

However, revolutions do not necessarily mean grand gestures of change. They often begin with small acts that act as ripples which, over time, grow into larger tsunamis of change. This Youth Parliament could take any number of directions to make those small changes. We can advocate, we can lobby, and we demand that 2050 becomes 2025. Of course, less time means that there is more work to do, but I am sure that I speak for many here today when I say, “We are ready for the challenge, so bring it on.” [*Applause.*]

I am not blind to the fact that a campaign on this issue will not be, in itself, the revolution we seek. I know that in many ways, it is already under way, but why are we leaving it to somebody else? A campaign to protect our environment would only serve to add to that revolution, and would be a single and unified declaration of intent by this nation’s official Youth Parliament that we will not be the generation to see our planet in ruins, and we will not let our predecessors be that either.

I see a revolution in front of us, so let us not fall behind. Let us make this bold declaration together, simply because we do not have 30 years left to waste. Diolch yn fawr; thank you very much, and I look forward to hearing the debate on this issue. [*Applause.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It was a great speech, but we will have to stop the clapping, or else we just will not get lots of people in. Just a quick clap will do it.

To oppose the motion, from the North East, I call Clark Kent E. Chavez.

Clark Kent E. Chavez (North East): Hello, fellow members of the Youth Parliament. Climate change, as we are all aware, is one of the most pressing issues that faces young people in the 21st century. It is a problem that does not discriminate, no matter your socioeconomic

background, race or religion; it does, and will, affect us all. However, in the same way that this issue does not discriminate, this is not a battle for just us.

I am sure we have all heard the story of David and Goliath. In short, the story goes as follows: David, a shepherd’s son, is pitted against the beast that is Goliath, and David—the clear underdog—wins the battle. Much in the same way, we are the young Davids, the underdogs in this fight, because while we in this room are strong together, this issue aims to address a problem that is much bigger than ourselves. To us as Members of the Youth Parliament, a campaign is to help those who are helpless, using our position and contacts to make changes in our own areas under a single objective. However, will a campaign on this issue be enough, or even necessary, to fight the stone-cold wall that towers above us? Madam Deputy Speaker, as a 5 foot 5 guy pushing on 5 foot 6, I can tell you that it is a very big wall.

This is not a discussion about the importance of this issue; it is about where it is fought, and we need to be realistic. We have reached a point where our efforts can only do so much; the bigger problems should now be fought at the top by the Governments, through means bigger than our own, because they are already being fought by us at the bottom. You see it on the screens, read it in the tabloids, and hear it on the radio. In the United Kingdom alone, almost 400,000 people took part in the climate strikes, along with millions of others around the world. We have people and communities recycling and reusing to limit their impacts on the environment, which is also evident in young people’s fashion wear: here in the UK, thrifting and second-hand retail saw a 9.2% rise in 2018. We are also making businesses adopt, and respond to, our own climate-conscious lifestyles. These small changes are already being made, and if someone or some community is not making those changes, by heck I can imagine we would bring that up, because the matter is already so apparent to us through these discussions.

Does this issue need another backing, saying, “Yes, we young people care about climate change and protecting the environment”? This battle is already being fought on the streets and in the cities, in the form of protests with banners bearing messages. Should it really be the Youth Parliament’s role to lead the way, when great efforts to tackle this bigger problem are already being made elsewhere? A campaign decided on today should be reserved for those problems on which we can make a difference, and where those issues can be brought to light. I ask you to think about where the bigger problem lies, and whether this will be enough of a campaign to sacrifice the opportunity to address another issue. The Goliath of a problem that this campaign aims to address requires more than just small changes, and more than just us alone.

Maisie Outhart (Yorkshire and Humber): I am here representing the young people of York; I am only the third, and hopefully not the final, speaker from Yorkshire. On the subject of denying people a voice, it would be hypocritical to call for an enhanced and extended democracy, as we do, and then vote against the young people by prioritising anything other than “Protect the Environment”.

Please remember that we are not here to make laws or decide the Budget. We are here to represent the voice of

young people, so please do the right thing. The other campaigns are valuable in their own right, but knife crime does not apply nationally, and the curriculum for life is just a drop in the ocean for an entrenched and intrinsically flawed education system. Protect the environment is a coherent, backed-up movement that the people have voted for. I urge you, as representatives of young people, to go along with what they say and do the right thing by voting to protect the environment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Do we have someone else from London?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Jaami Barry (London): Good afternoon, everyone. Today we're all dressed up nice and looking good, but it is important to realise that in our society and our world, we cannot grow up in ignorance. It is so important to take into consideration matters such as the environment and many more. The fundamental issue—more important than anything else—for young people is our physical and mental wellbeing, so I urge you to vote for the mental health motion.

When we go to sleep at night, it is not the environment that keeps us up; it is the anxiety and stress that we may face or are anticipating facing the following day. If you look around, you will see how diverse the room is. Quite typically, parents from ethnic minorities are unwilling to accept or unable to comprehend the fact that mental health problems are a valid and actual issue, and that stress and anxiety are good enough excuses to not get 10 A*s in your GCSEs.

The environment will be tackled in many other ways, but the most prominent issue for young people is our mental health. When I wake up tomorrow, I will think, “Will I make it to school?” because the streets are so dangerous nowadays. There is so much that can affect us and harm us. That is why I urge you all to vote for the mental health campaign first.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Do we have someone from the East Midlands?

Husna Iqbal (East Midlands): I do think it is important that we protect the environment, but I also think it is important that we consider the situation of around 3 million children living in poverty in the UK. How do we expect children living in poverty to care about the plastic cutlery that they use to eat the only meal they will have that day? People have priorities, and we cannot blame them for that. Solutions are being mentioned—100% organic, fully vegan, no palm oil—but the reality is that those are not accessible for everyone. Why would I campaign for something that is not inclusive and representative of all the people I want to represent? I do think that we should protect the environment, but I also think we should tackle the issues faced by young people in the UK whose voices are not being heard.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone from the Army Welfare Service?

Luis Garcia (British Armed Force Bases Overseas): I will be brief. I am sure you have all heard of Extinction Rebellion, and I am sure you have seen them on the

news climbing on top of trains, forcing them to stop. That only alienates the public and undermines the campaign. I am sure that all of you are passionate about protecting the environment, but instead of climbing on trains, organise things like beach cleans.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Do we have someone else from Scotland?

Fraser Brown (Scotland): I am from Mid-Scotland and Fife. Environmental protection is important—so important that thousands of organisations are already tackling it. We can use the opportunity of us voting here in the House of Commons to vote for something that is less talked about and represent our constituents in a new and personal way, not just by adding to the masses of environmental protection groups. Vote for tackling hate crime as a UK-wide issue, because a lot is being done for the environment, but not enough is being done about hate crime. No matter whether the protect the environment motion is passed, we will continue to fight for action to be taken. Thank you for listening.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Are you indicating that you would like to speak, sir? Go ahead.

Vladislav Brusarski (South East): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am an MYP for Bracknell Forest. I congratulate both MYPs who proposed the motion and the one who opposed it.

I would like to introduce you to a different perspective—a different way of looking at things. Every single one of the topics in the order of business is equally important to me. I understand that if you look at the issues, you find that everyone has an opinion on which one should make it as the top campaign, but I would like you to consider the curriculum to prepare us for life as a foundation for every single one of them. Let me explain what I mean.

Protecting the environment is undeniably a very current issue. It is bigger than this Chamber. It is about the youth as much as the elderly. A curriculum to prepare us for life should be used as a foundation in our schools to illuminate each and every one of our problems, whether it be mental health or using the classroom to take action on protecting the environment. It could also be used to help us with politics. The issue of votes at 16 has recurred time and again; people have been wanting to speak on it, but you cannot expect people to vote without giving them the education.

A similar thing applies to protecting the environment. We cannot expect a conversation without an action, and action stems from preparation and education.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let us hear from the gentleman with the waistcoat and the red tie.

Francis Humble (North East): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am from the mighty Darlington. Today, I would like to agree with my friend from London, who so eloquently said that climate change is something that is bigger than all of us. Realistically, one in eight young people aged five to 19 is suffering from a mental health problem. How can we put aside their needs in order to vote in favour of another campaign when

scientists agree on an estimate of about 12 years for when we will be affected most by climate change? Truthfully, the young people in our constituencies and across the UK who are suffering from mental health issues do not have the luxury of worrying about what may happen 12 years in the future or even a year into the future. Instead, they are condemned to worry about what people may think of them, about how they may be judged and about the constant suffering and agony that they face every day.

If MYPs in this Parliament will not stand with me to protect the most vulnerable people in our constituencies and our society, I ask why we stand at all.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Now let us hear from the lady in the blue dress.

Poppy Mansfield Jones (South East): Although I have loved every second of listening to you all today, I know that I am going to go home and tomorrow sit with Kent Youth County Council. I am going to sit all day in Maidstone, and we are going to work through some amazing issues. I just want to remind you that, although we sit here as the UK Youth Parliament and feel amazing and as though we can do so much across the whole UK, it isn't like that, because we do not meet on a regular basis; we cannot do things like that.

I swear to you that in Kent there are things that we have been able to do already as young people. The opposition said that we should not, as young people, be working on this, because it should be a Government point. And it should be. But when you think about things like mental health, you realise that that is to do with the NHS; it is to do with funding from the Government. We cannot actually do much on that. The environment is something that we can work on in all our areas. We can all make a difference, no matter what we do.

In my school even, I have managed to create an ecosociety. We now have compostable packaging, recycling bins and a mini orchard for biodiversity. We are lobbying people every single month with student strikes. We have councillors coming in. I have a councillor coming to my school to talk about cycle lanes. These are things that we can do in our local area. Although this is incredible, we cannot ever have these kinds of things happening on a large scale. We tried to tackle knife crime this year, and in Kent we found it incredibly difficult. We met councillors. We have managed to set up select committees. But it just won't work, because we are young people. However, there are some things that we can do incredibly well as young people that are emotional and that are about things that actually affect us all. With education and things like a curriculum for life, they are of course going to lead us into all those kinds of things in the future. They are going to educate us on how to be sustainable and the kind of people who will stop hate crime. That is so important, but there are things that we can achieve and that we can put on to the Government. You have seen it already—we have student strikes and Extinction Rebellion. They are all led by young people.

The environment is, in a horrible way, a young people's issue, because not enough has been done about it in the past by people who are older, and who have already been working on it. We have known about it for decades, and nothing has been done that is enough. It is up to us

to do this, so please vote to protect the environment. We can make a difference when we go home today if we choose this. We cannot do that with some of the other topics.

I cannot solve mental health, I cannot solve knife crime, and I cannot solve hate crime, but I know in my local area that I can make a huge difference if I give myself the time to protect the environment. If we vote for the motion, and if we are able to give ourselves the time to do it in our areas as UK Youth Parliament Members, we can make a difference, so please vote for it. Thank you so much. *[Applause.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: You are all confusing me, because in this Chamber we do not stand up and clap to congratulate people, like in the theatre or at a concert. Standing up means that you want to speak. Lots of you are not—*[Interruption.]* That is more like it—now I know where I am. I call the gentleman in the pink shirt.

Jude Smith (Yorkshire and Humber): My name is Jude, I am from Yorkshire and Humber, and I am going to speak for protecting the environment. Hello MYPs. I believe that at this point, quelling the climate catastrophe is undoubtedly the most pressing and universal issue for not only the UK but the whole world. Climate change is repeatedly mentioned, yet people neglect the fact that climate change is a class struggle. How can we tackle the crisis at hand when we are so ignorant as a society of the fact that we need to enable those who cannot currently afford to lead sustainable lives to do so?

Nobody should be so neglected by the state that they cannot even join the fight against global warming. We need to subsidise eco-friendly sectors, drastically improving infrastructure for electric cars and cycle lanes. However, it is not just individual efforts. The majority of the fight needs to be taken to the doors of No. 10 and the colossal carbon polluting companies around the world. Ultimately, they are the people who affect it the most.

It is great for us not to use single-use plastic, but we have to look at the 70% of all carbon emissions made by the biggest companies. We need to look at that as young people and say, "That's not right. That is something that we have to tackle." It is sad that we have been given the mantle of responsibility to do so, but we have been given it now, so we might as well act. We, the young people, will set the flames of the climate revolution. Thank you.

Bethan Hoggan (South East): Good afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker and my fellow Members of the Youth Parliament. Greta Thunberg said:

"Our house is on fire",

but she is wrong. It is not our house; it is our home. Our home is on fire. You can move houses, renovate them, sell them, and then move into another one—but when it is your home, it is different. This earth is the one place we have; yet we still do not take enough action to save our home from destruction.

Our home is on fire—with its clear blue springs, scenic woodlands and picturesque mountains. They are all at risk of being slowly destroyed. In 20 years or so, who is to say how much of our world will be left? The Scottish Youth Parliament has already started its national campaign, "Pack it up, Pack it in". *[Applause.]* But

Scotland is not the only country affected; this is a worldwide issue, and this is not enough. A vote for the motion would not be meaningless. It is a vote for life as we know it. Let us protect our home. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is so difficult. We will go to the other side of the House. I call the lady in the blue dress. I will call someone from the other side in a moment. Would you give your name, please?

Zain Alsoud (West Midlands): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We have only one planet, one world and one home. If it were not for Greta Thunberg—sorry to mention her again—I seriously doubt that this would have been the motion with the most votes. Once again, it is up to us kids following a trend to deal with our planet's illness. We can do as many Friday strikes as we want, but we must not waste the position of influence we have by not using it on our planet.

It seems that politicians do not realise that this is the land we will grow up in, raise our kids in, try frogs' legs for the first time in, climb the Eiffel tower in, fall in love in, fall out of love in, grow old in, and eventually be buried in. We have to do more about our environment. We should not think that our actions are inconsequential because we are only one country among hundreds. We should use Britain's position of power to influence other countries to follow our lead. We had no problem with invasion 100 years ago, so we should have no problem with persuasion today.

We must not be selfish; that is why politics rarely highlights this issue. We have to work together with one another, for one another. I am not a Christian, but I would like to quote the Bible. Genesis states: "God looked at everything he had made, and he was pleased." Please, whether you believe in God or not, let's do whoever or whatever caused this earth to be in existence proud.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: This is really difficult. The North West has not been called yet, so is there someone from the North West?

Elizabeth Coulthard (North West): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Everyone is affected by climate change, yet many choose to ignore it for fear that they cannot make a change. As a group of young people, even though some think we cannot, we most definitely can. We have a platform—a platform that is listened to. So many young people think, "What can I do in my area?" It is about going back, speaking to people and telling them, "This is what we can do in our area," whether that is beach cleans or even just litter picks.

Make Your Mark this year was amazing for us. Although "Protect the Environment" came out on top, it also told us that litter was an issue. Those two issues are linked. This is about finding issues in your area that link together, and working together to make them better.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are supposed to be winding up now, but do you reckon that you could get through the Division Lobbies and do the voting in under half an hour? [MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH PARLIAMENT: "Yes!"] Right. If we think we can do that a bit faster, we can take a few more speeches—but not very many. I will take the gentleman with the glasses.

Alex Maidens (West Midlands) *rose*—

Leighton Anderson (Scotland) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry; that was very difficult, because my eyesight is dreadful. I will take that gentleman first, and I will call the gentleman in front of him next.

Alex Maidens (West Midlands): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Without sounding too hubristic, there are very few things I am scared of, but I will admit that there is one thing that I am quite terrified of and that shakes me to my core: climate change deniers and sceptics. They are terrifying. They diminish my faith in society. Although other issues remain prevalent, we must stand with our brothers and sisters in Extinction Rebellion. The ignorance of basic facts and figures must not be carried on to the next generation of politicians.

No matter how mentally healthy, knife-free or accepting of one another we are, we cannot hold back rising sea levels or the extinction of animals, so let's turn off the coal power plants and build more wind farms and electric vehicle charging stations. The Government are successfully working on mental health initiatives and hate crime. I do not trust the Department for Education to bring a sufficient curriculum into our schools, so we must come together to make it economically beneficial for the private sector to be green. Let's vote for a greener Britain, a better Britain and a better world.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let us hear from someone from London.

Joe Crabtree (London): Climate change will affect all of us. Many people believe that we are far from these effects, but they are wrong: rising sea levels are drowning small island nations, air pollution is suffocating major cities such as London, and the Amazon rainforest, the lungs of our planet, is burning alive. This may all sound dramatic, but our planet is living, and its life is at stake. As young people, we will have to face the worst effects of the climate crisis, but we still have time—we still have a chance.

I put it to you that our environment is central to our survival. Protecting our environment will prevent millions of species from going extinct. Protecting our environment will save beautiful natural spaces from destruction. Protecting our environment will stop the most damaging effects of climate change. That is why I urge you to vote for this motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the other gentleman in the glasses.

Leighton Anderson (Scotland): I represent the Highlands and Islands, so I am the most northerly MYP.

I would like to talk about the environment and how it affects my local community. Shetland has been hugely affected by climate change, from our vast fishing industry to tourism. My fellow Scottish MYPs have heard me say this before at our own national campaign, where we chose “Pack it up, Pack it in” for 2019-20. Shetland’s puffin population has dropped dramatically since 2000, when there were over 33,000 puffins on the island in early spring. By 2017 the figure had fallen to only 570, and there is no sign of recovery.

My fellow MYPs, think about your communities and how they have been affected. Personally, I think this is horrendous. That is why I ask you to back environmental protection as our campaign—not just for the puffins, but for our future.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let us hear from someone from the North West.

Emma Greenwood (North West): The time for change is now. We are the last people who will have the power to do something. We need to stop putting profit before preservation and protection. It is estimated that we have 12 years to take action, and this action must be drastic. So far this year we have lost 18.7 million acres of rainforest, and 2,000 species have become extinct. These numbers are not opinions but facts, and they further support the scientists who continue to fight to get those in power to see the threat that our planet is under.

Every single one of us will feel the effects of climate change, so denial is no longer an option. We need to stop treating this as a “what if” scenario and realise that it is just a question of when. The chief executive of the Environment Agency has warned that within 25 years England might not have enough clean water to meet current demand. I want this to scare you. This should not be something that we are going to accept. This is so much more than political problems, austerity, capitalism or Brexit. This is the existence of our planet; this is our future.

We need those in power to act and to put their differences aside to ensure that current and future generations have access to one of the most basic human rights: a safe place to live. I urge you to support the motion so that we can ensure that the UK can work in unity with countries across the world to tackle the one thing that no one is safe from.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We have not yet heard anyone from the South West.

Ella Edmonds (South West): I have not written anything down, because honestly I find this terrifying and had not planned to speak, but I feel that I have to say what I am thinking.

I completely agree with everything that has been said so far. We need to take action immediately. We need to do everything we can to save our planet, ourselves, our children and even the adults who will survive the consequences of what they have made. However, how can we expect people to make the necessary changes if we are not educating them on how to do so? This is not only about us and our children; we need to teach the adults, because it is the fumes from their companies and cars that are killing our environment. How are they

supposed to know that if they were never taught it? How are we supposed to know it if we are never taught it? As has been said, we probably would not even know about this had it not become such a trend recently. How can we expect people to make big changes if we are not teaching them how to do it?

Therefore, we need to reform the education system—i.e. the curriculum for life. I suggest that we really consider voting for an education system that teaches us about climate change, and not just take action that we know will be very difficult to take immediately. Why do it immediately when we know we can make it last longer and have a more substantial effect on our children and their future?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the lady at the front.

Evie Smith (North West): Too many people are destroying the environment. It will get worse for animals, because there is no chance for them to be saved at all. Thank you.

Several MYPs rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is terribly difficult. My Clerks tell me that we ought to wind up the debate—I am terribly sorry. I must tell you that it is always like this in Parliament: as we come to the end of the day, not everyone gets called. We must leave enough time, so I will call one more speaker from each side of the House.

Ewan Brett (East of England): Never before have we faced a threat so direct, indiscriminate and impending, with an impact not just on Brits but on mankind as a whole. Last year, the Government were forced to announce a climate crisis. Now, we need them to act like there is one. I want them to be scared, to react and to feel the same fear our generation faces daily, not knowing if there will be a world for our future children to live in and not knowing if our houses will survive the next 100 years. The very homes we know and love could be gone. How do the Government respond? With arbitrary promises: zero carbon emissions by 2050. That is not enough; 2050 is too late.

Thirteen thousand scientists from more than 120 nations agree that if something is not done in the next 20 years, there will be a chain of reactions resulting in a climate catastrophe. I call on my fellow MYPs to vote on this issue. It is time for us to wake up the House of Commons before it sleepwalks millions to their death. Year on year we plead that the Government will make a difference, but they do not do enough. I ask you at No. 10: what are you going to do to save our one chance at a future?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the lady in the red jumper.

Martha Lucas (London): The UK is being selfish. It continues to emit harmful carbon dioxide into our environment. Who does that affect? The most disadvantaged in our world, through fires, droughts and floods—the most disadvantaged who are not even contributing to the problem. That is not fair. We close our eyes to the reality that we are harming our own world. We close

our eyes, because we have that reusable water bottle and drink from a can—we think, “It’s okay; I am making a change.”

Those small changes are no longer enough. We need a big change. As everyone has eloquently said, we are running out of time. We need to make a change now to protect our environment, because it is so easy to ignore that packet of crisps that was not recyclable, or that water bottle that we bought. We need to make a bigger change and we need to start now. That is why you should vote to protect our environment.

Several MYPs rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am really sorry, but we will all be in trouble if we overrun and you miss your trains and so on. [*Interruption.*] I am so sorry, but we are going to have to have the winding-up speech for this debate, which is from Cormac Savage from Northern Ireland.

Cormac Savage (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think it is safe to say that nobody is happy to see me standing at the Dispatch Box.

We are staring down the barrel of extinction. Ice caps are melting, communities are disappearing and sea levels are rising. We have been given an ultimatum in the march for climate justice: 12 years to change our ways or face catastrophe. In the words of Debra Roberts, one of the authors of the UN report on climate:

“The next few years are probably the most important in our history”.

Now the spotlight is on us, as the Youth Parliament—the voice of those most affected by this crisis. We must today make a final, definite choice: how do we, as the representatives of this endangered future, plan to take real action? Can we afford the bureaucracy of modern government? Is there the time? Let me say this: all the summits, inquiries and conferences in the world will not fix the climate emergency that is ravaging this planet. This represents the struggle of a generation—our generation. No all-party parliamentary group, no report, no pledge, and no target our Government can set will bring about the green revolution that we need to save this planet from destruction.

Since 1999, 16 and 17-year-olds in this country have campaigned for the right to vote; 20 years later, we see that the fight must still go on. On this issue, we do not have 20 years; we have 12. It is a bleak truth: 20 years from now it will be too late. We need to take action now. This is an issue on which empty pledges, bureaucratic dilly-dallying and placeholder promises cannot and must not count for anything. Youth MPs, the future has called to us for real action. For the sake of future generations, we must answer that call.

But does that include a campaign? Are the hoops of bureaucracy worth even attempting to jump through? Or is a movement what we need—millions of people changing lifestyles, taking to the streets, and telling the corporations and fossil fools who ravage our planet for their own gain that we have had enough of their climate complicity? We know that there is no planet B. It falls to us—those with our futures truly on the line—to take up the gauntlet, step outside the Government, march in

our thousands and shed light on the crisis of the millennium. Our sea levels are rising, and so must we—[*Applause.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That was not the final word.

Cormac Savage: I could talk for hours about this issue.

As the Prime Minister of these nations, Boris Johnson, dismisses us out of hand as “unco-operative crusties”, I stand before you, colleagues, proud to be an unco-operative crusty, because while the future of this planet is at stake, I will not co-operate with those who continue to choose pollution over solution, Rolaxes over rainforests, and climate change over system change. [*Applause*] When our leaders see fit to disregard our thousands of pleading placards, it begs the question: is this a matter for our own hands? When young people vote in droves for a climate revolution, should we in the Youth Parliament not be the leaders in this revolution? As the voice of the young people of these nations, do we not owe it to them not only to join them in the fight, but to be leaders in it? Is that not our mandate, colleagues?

For Greta Thunberg and the almost 400,000 young people in Make Your Mark who stood against climate inaction and proclaimed, “Down with this sort of thing,” so that the fossil fools of Government would hear, must we not act here, today, in this House of Commons? They shouted a message to the halls of power: “Down with climate complicity, down with the empty promises, and down with the bureaucracy that is stymieing us in this fight.” Today, we walk the halls of power and we must decide how to act. They have sent a clear message to power itself: “Manage this crisis. Be not the leaders we have in climate, but the leaders we want, the leaders we need and the leaders we deserve.”

Colleagues, for these almost 400,000 young people who sent this message, must we not do everything in our power to answer their pleas? Bear the torch of action, campaign on the environment, amplify their voices, and make change the priority of those in power. The question you must answer today is simple: is a campaign on protecting our environment a brick in the wall of climate justice? Or will we be nothing but more unco-operative crusties talking to a brick wall, begging for our salvation, and disregarded with hollow words, empty promises and dismissive duplicity? That is the question you must answer. Go raibh maith agat. [*Applause.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

I note that the way in which you are going to vote is different from the way in which we normally vote in here. Just so that you get a little taste for how we normally do it, let us have a little vote first before you go into the Lobbies. Normally at this point, the occupant of the Chair would say, “The Question is,” whatever is before us. So, I put it to you that the Question is, That it is the greatest privilege in a democratic society to sit in the Chamber of the House of Commons.

As many as are of that opinion say Aye. [MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH PARLIAMENT: “Aye!”] On the contrary No—[*Laughter.*] The Ayes have it; the Ayes have it. Order, order.

I am so glad you all agree with that, because it is indeed an enormous privilege to sit on these Benches.

There are literally thousands of people at this moment filling in nomination forms in 650 constituencies across the country, competing to be the next 650 people who have the enormous privilege of sitting on these Benches.

The Youth Parliament will now vote on which of the five subjects debated today it will select as its two national campaign issues for 2020. In the Lobby, you will each be given two ballot papers: one white paper for the two reserved, or UK-wide, subjects; and one green paper for the three devolved—for today's purposes, England-only—subjects, which affects those from Scotland and Wales. You should place a cross in the box next to the subject you would like to vote for on each ballot paper and hand the completed ballot papers to the Doorkeepers in the Lobbies. Afterwards, please return to your own place in the Chamber.

Those of you on my right—on the Government benches—should leave the Chamber by the door behind me and turn left into the Aye Lobby to vote. Those on my left—the Opposition benches—should leave by the doors at the far end and turn left into the No Lobby. Members of the House of Commons staff, whom I can see loitering at the doors, will be on hand to assist you. The Division Lobbies are now open—Division!

3.8 pm

Division.

Peterloo Anniversary

3.24 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members of the Youth Parliament will now make speeches on the anniversary of Peterloo and political reform. This is a really important subject, and I am looking forward to hearing what you have to say. To begin with, I call Molly Lambert from the East Midlands.

Molly Lambert (East Midlands): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Two hundred years ago, up to 60,000 working-class people marched to demand political representation at a time when only wealthy landowners could vote. Many of those people were inspired by Thomas Paine's book, "The Rights of Man". Said book was written in 1791, and contains this statement:

"There are two classes of people to whom the laws of England are particularly hostile, and those the most helpless; younger children, and the poor."

Upon reading this, a clear idea of what political reform I would like to see came into my head. We should reform the prison system, this time focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment, especially for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or have been roped into crime through processes such as county lines.

Prisoners who can be rehabilitated deserve the chance to be helped, whether with their mental state, their addiction, or whatever else they are struggling with. It would be most effective to help them by providing psychiatrists and hobbies, to teach them to write, to paint, to work out, to cook—anything that could not only transfer to a job on the outside, but feed their hearts and souls. I am stood here telling you that our system does not work, but reformation could change that. I am so grateful to get to stand here and remember the people who died at Peterloo, but it is such a shame that blood had to, and must still, be spilled before someone takes action on something that needs to be fixed. Thank you so much.

Prajwal Pandey (East of England): The right for common people to vote has never been free. It has always come at a cost, costs such as the killing of protesters in St Peter's Field, Manchester, 200 years ago, on 16 August 1819, at a time in our country's history when only the wealthy and those at the top of society had the right to vote. This was the Peterloo massacre, when the Manchester magistrates requested that the Manchester Yeomanry cavalry and the 15th Regiment of Dragoons break up a meeting of more than 60,000 political reformists in St Peter's Field. Those reformists were lobbying for the right to vote to be extended to the working class and the citizens of Manchester and Salford, who at that point had no dedicated MP.

Upon receiving the request, those two regiments went on to attack the demonstrators—men, women and children—leading to over 668 casualties. Although the demonstrators were suppressed on 16 August 1819, their actions were a great contributor to the almost universal suffrage that we have in the UK today. The passion, the spirit, and the heart of the masses in St Peter's Field live on today in the passion we have in our

democratic system. Following the massacre, newspapers propagated lies. They claimed that the demonstrators, who were in fact peaceful protesters, were rioters, and that it was right for the meeting to be broken up with violence. The mass media abused their power. They manipulated the masses and caused political reform in Britain to be further delayed. The political reformists of those times were forced to circulate their own discreet newspapers to counter that fake news.

Rather than looking at what direct reforms can be made to our political system, we should be focusing on countering those who wish to intervene in our fair, democratic political system as our next major reform. Again and again, we see social media platforms censoring individuals expressing their own opinion; we see media outlets manipulating information and being allowed to spread fake news, and we just watch. We watch while they swing the masses into believing whatever fits into their agenda. Not much has changed since the time of the Peterloo massacre in that respect, and if we do not act—if we do not ensure that our rights are not restricted and that fake news is not circulated—the struggles of the more than 60,000 demonstrators on 16 August 1819 in St Peter's Field will forever be in vain.

Nick Papanicolaou (London): I stand here in the mother of Parliaments—a place seen as a beacon of democracy—and reflect that we did not arrive here by design, but through the struggles of our predecessors. Two hundred years ago, over 60,000 working-class men, women and children marched at Peterloo, peacefully protesting for political representation. Although their modest demands were met with violence, leaving 18 dead, their vision and sacrifice paved the way for a democratic journey. And yet, that journey has stopped—stopped at a time when democracy lacks inclusion. It is broken. The answer is to finally empower the 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds who are excluded from decision making and to reconnect and re-energise an entire generation with the spirit of political engagement. The answer is votes at 16.

At 16, we can pay tax, we can marry and we can even join the Army for the ideal of democracy, but we cannot take part in it. Let us in! Why were we unworthy of a say in the EU referendum—us, who will be most impacted by the outcome? We deserve to be heard. That is why we must continue the legacy and the journey of those who demonstrated. Let us not stop. Let us continue to perfect, expand and embrace democracy and make it work for all. You have heard all this before, but that does not mean we should stop fighting for it.

Ben Guadagno (North East): On 16 August 1819, the Manchester Yeomanry cavalry was given orders at 1.30 pm to charge at the radical demonstrators. That private militia was used by the influential landowners to hold on to power, resulting in 18 dead and over 600 injured. It was the age-old story of David versus Goliath, except that this time, the catapult was embodied by the democratic voice of over 60,000 people marching, paving the way for parliamentary democracy.

The powerful were correct: voting—the idea that anyone can voice their opinion—was a radical idea, and yet it is the most elegant idea that any human being has ever come up with. It is the most sacred and fundamental pillar holding up our democracy, and it is under threat.

I am talking about the political data manipulation happening all around us, 24/7, where political advertising companies use data mining without your consent to know more about you than you know about yourself. Swarms of online bots create a personalised, distorted reality for you on a scale hitherto undreamt of, excessively manipulating the way you vote.

In such a defining moment, we are woefully unequipped, with the majority of data protection legislation being 15 years old. I am here today to raise awareness about political reform, as David is very real and very much alive. In the memory of those who, 200 years ago, paid in blood for values we enjoy today, we as a generation need to take back control of our opinions, so that their efforts were not in vain.

Adham Saeid (North West): We look back on the Peterloo massacre today to commemorate the 18 people who were killed while simply exercising their right to protest. Today, we thank those who gave their lives for allowing us to vote in a fair, democratic system. However, when commemorating events, we must not be blind to modern-day examples of such atrocities. Countries around the world still see violence in the face of peaceful protests. We need not look any further than Hong Kong, where so-called rioters have been physically abused, pushed down escalators and even shot.

Protesting remains—and presumably always will remain—an integral part of international politics. Protesting allows those with restricted voting powers to express their voice in search of political change—the strikers in Hong Kong, those in Iraq protesting to end years of corruption, and youth climate strikers.

Two hundred years ago 60,000 stood in Manchester, on St Peter's Field, demanding their right to vote and were met with violence; and today, thousands of young people, also in Manchester, stand in St Peter's Square, demanding that they will not have their right to see old age stripped from them. Those who died, were injured or even stood at Peterloo serve as inspiration to us all—young people and adults alike—so when the next opportunity arises to skip school to campaign against climate change, to march through the centres of our cities to promote cleaner air or simply to be part of something bigger than us, let's honour those at Peterloo and take it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I now call, from Northern Ireland, Conor Boyle.

Conor Boyle (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Each one of us can be incredibly proud that we have come here today to take up residence in this House—a House that we know as our Parliament and that is known across the world affectionately and, in my view, rightly as the mother of all Parliaments. However, anybody who has an interest in history, as I do, will understand that this country has not always been the mother of all democracies—there is a real distinction there.

As a nation, therefore, it is more than appropriate that we reflect today on the Peterloo massacre. Today is about remembering the 18 people who were brutally killed on St Peter's Field. The sacrifice that each one of those pioneering souls made should be a source of great shame for the nation that was. Those who came out to

protest were calling only for the right to cast a ballot for their Parliament. However, in addition to remembering, we must make an attempt to look back at the progress that has been made over the two-century interregnum.

Peterloo was, for its time, a radical political event. It was the call of mainly working-class men of England to get the right to vote. They dared to question the far-away elite that made decisions in their name. Their so-called outrageous demands were met by the Manchester special constabulary and the yeomen of both Cheshire and Salford in a cavalry charge that left almost 20 dead and as many as 700 injured. Today, let William Fildes, who was only two when he fell from his mother's arms, and Mary Heys, a pregnant mother of six, and, indeed, so many others be in our thoughts and memories.

I am sure that all will agree that those facts make for grim listening, yet in a way is that not the point of today's commemoration? Could something like that happen in our country today? No, of course it could not, because our country has been irreversibly transformed since that dark day. It is right that we look back soberly, but let us today also celebrate with pride what has happened in the 200 years that have come since: the Great Reform Act and the franchise that was delivered to all men, Disraeli's declaration of one nation and the repeal of the corn laws, followed by more reforms that lowered the voting age to 18 and extended the franchise to the women of this country. Finally, we had the Parliament Acts, which asserted the supremacy of the House of Commons—the people's House—over the House of Lords. Of course, we have also had the devolution of power, which brought power closer to the people of this country, from the Isles of Scilly to the isles of Shetland—with the puffin—and from Fermanagh, through my native Armagh, and the whole way to Suffolk.

The Youth Parliament should be encouraged by this history of ours. We should know that if we are bold, brave and strong enough, we will follow in the footsteps of our inspiring forebears. We will let their memory be always in our thoughts, and let it be a testament to our resolve to fight for the change that we seek.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I now call, from Scotland, Aaran McDonald.

Aaran McDonald (Scotland): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This year marks 200 years since the Peterloo massacre, which saw innocent protesters killed and injured by British cavalry. It was a defining moment of the 1800s for those seeking to make our country fairer, more democratic and, yes, more representative. As we commemorate the 200th anniversary, it is for our generation to come up with what reforms we would like to see. I believe that we need an overhaul of our parliamentary system, which is seen by many to be out of date, out of touch and, yes, a bit crusty. I believe we do that by having an elected upper Chamber, which would see all regions, areas, backgrounds and life experiences represented, but I believe that that upper Chamber must have dedicated seats to be filled by—elected by—us, the young people, so that young people can have a real say in what laws are made and the governance of our country, to finally make our country fair for every young person.

Madam Deputy Speaker: From the South East, I call Rory Moore.

Rory Moore (South East): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Two hundred years ago, tens of thousands of people came together to demand political change. With only the wealthy elite allowed to vote, residents of what is now known as greater Manchester marched into the centre of the city. They demanded that their voices be heard in the political process—but that action was not taken without sacrifice.

Eighteen people were killed and hundreds were injured as they peacefully demanded the right to representation. We must recognise that those people died trying to secure their right to vote—our right to vote. That is why it is crucial that we use that right. Turnout in elections and referendums is at its lowest among young people. For instance, in the 2015 general election just 43% of 18 to 24-year-olds voted, compared with 78% of over 65s.

How do we address that? Put simply, we need to introduce mandatory political education in schools across the United Kingdom. Our education is so broad nowadays. We learn about everything from how to solve quadratic equations to how to analyse Shakespeare's works, so why can we not add the basics of democracy to that list? Voting is a fundamental aspect of life, but we cannot expect young people to participate if they do not know how it works.

An informed electorate is a key part of a functioning democracy, and if we educate young people about our politics and how to find information—and, of course, how to evaluate its authenticity—they will be more engaged. That could help to tackle the shockingly low turnout among young people. Most important of all, a political education would give young people the confidence to go and exercise the democratic right that people died for at Peterloo 200 years ago. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: From the South West, I call Jamie Burrell.

Jamie Burrell (South West): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Two hundred years ago on 16 August 1819 more than 60,000 ordinary people took to St Peter's Field in Manchester to call on the Government to give them the right to vote. At that time, only rich, land-owning men could vote, and many believed that that was unfair. The protest later turned violent when private armies were brought in. They killed 18 of the peaceful protesters and injured more than 650. That is more protesters injured at Peterloo than there are MPs' seats in the House of Commons today.

Now, 200 years on, people still march peacefully to call for action on different issues. For example, since Greta Thunberg started her climate strike last August thousands of people in the UK, many of whom are of school age—including many, I am sure, who are sitting in the Chamber now—have called on the Government to take action against climate change. We young people passionately call for the protection of our futures. It is us who will be hit hardest.

There have also been multiple marches recently campaigning for a people's vote on Brexit, many organised by young people. Again, that is because we will be most affected by the outcome—an outcome in which we have

not had a say. That is what the UK Youth Parliament is here for. We are here today because we insist on having a say in our futures. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: From Wales, I call Dylan Lewis-Rowlands.

Dylan Lewis-Rowlands (Wales): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Reform, universal suffrage, equal representation and love: words in the minds, and ideas in the hearts, of those who died at the Peterloo massacre 200 years ago—those who stood together in peaceful solidarity.

Those ideas should be in our hearts today: reform, because we need to reform our way of life to tackle climate change, and we need to reform our system so that every voice is heard; universal suffrage and equal representation, because they are key ideas for the Youth Parliament, while we continue to fight for votes at 16 and campaign on issues close to our hearts across the country; and love, because in a world—and a country—that is bitterly divided, love is what can unite us. In a time like ours, we need to stand together with protesters from across the centuries for those same ideals.

In remembering Peterloo, we remember that we fight not only for ourselves and for one another—for everyone in this Chamber—but for those who gave their lives for what they believed in. Although I hope no one in the Chamber has to give their life for what they believe in, I also hope that the memory of those who did so 200 years ago inspires us to change our society in any way we can, like they did at Peterloo.

Madam Deputy Speaker: From the West Midlands, I call Millie Gould.

Millie Gould (West Midlands): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are standing on the shoulders of our predecessors. Two hundred years ago, the peaceful Peterloo protesters paved the way for our present day political autonomy. However, the reformation has not gone far enough. The majority of young people are disengaged and apathetic about politics, hence only 57% of 18 to 25-year-olds turned out to vote in the 2017 general election, compared with 84% of over-65s. In addition, there is considerably lower turnout among those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds and/or ethnic minority groups. It is hardly surprising that those with the power are those with the political capital—the currency that allows them to achieve political reform.

Politics should be a multiplayer game—in fact, politics shouldn't even be a game—but we live in a world of corruption and exploitation, where the system can be cheated and manipulated. That is not a democracy. However, if those at the top are not playing by the rules, perhaps the rulebook needs to be open and accessible to all those who want to play. Politics has become a microcosm for the elite and wealthy, suppressing the disadvantaged and disenfranchised as the underdogs.

We demand a level playing field. Knowledge is power, and everyone should have the right to a substantial and unbiased education in politics. Transparency is crucial to a true democracy.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The final speech on the Peterloo anniversary comes from the representative of Yorkshire and Humber, Torin Zieboll.

Torin Zieboll (Yorkshire and Humber): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Two hundred years ago today, working-class people from Lancashire gathered at St Peter's field in Manchester to demand parliamentary reform. Back then, Manchester and the great mill towns had no representation, save two MPs for the entire county. That meant that huge swathes of the population in effect had no representation. MPs often lived well outside their boroughs, and some represented rotten boroughs—ancient settlements with little population. Manchester had a population of more than 60,000 but no MPs, save those two county Members.

On 16 August 1819, more than 60,000 Lancastrians gathered at Manchester to hear the orator Henry Hunt make the case for the reform of Parliament. The local magistrates, who had rented a room over the field, panicked. They read the riot act, unheard by anyone but themselves, and the justices of the peace ordered the troops into the crowd, slashing with sabres and shooting with muskets indiscriminately. More than 650 were injured and 18 were killed. Afterwards, the leaders were jailed for sedition, but journalists from Manchester and London had witnessed the day's horrors and wrote sympathetic accounts in their newspapers. In 1832, the Government reformed Parliament, scrapping rotten boroughs and extending the vote.

The reform that we all want to see changes every year, but we must remember that it is thanks to Peterloo that we are all here today, being given a chance to be heard and to represent young people. Let us remember Peterloo not as a day of sadness but as a day of progress and unity.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I am very impressed that you all appreciate, and have made such moving speeches about, the development of our democracy. I know that you will never forget that the freedom we enjoy today was hard fought for by those who came before us. Your presence here today, in this cradle of democracy, is part of taking forward that defence of democracy and freedom for future generations. Thank you for all that you have done.

We have now concluded our main business today. We will now move on to the closing statements. I call the House of Commons Librarian, and managing director of research and information, Penny Young.

Penny Young (House of Commons Librarian): I am the House of Commons Librarian, which is a fantastic job and a great privilege. It was the Library that provided your briefings for the debates today. We also publish information on pretty much everything that is relevant to debates that happen in this place, and indeed for MPs' constituency work. There is an awful lot on Brexit, of course, but I can guarantee that you will also find information on things that you are personally interested in. Just recently, for example, we published briefings on school funding, the social background of MPs, support for care leavers, food banks in the UK and—I confess that I did not know much about this until I read the briefing—loot boxes in video games. If you are not already following us on Twitter, please do so—@commonslibrary—and

sign up for our briefings. Please consider the Library as a career move, because we need fantastic people like you. I must say that this whole thing has been utterly amazing.

I congratulate each and every one of you on a fantastic day. You have debated issues that are of the utmost importance not only to the young people here and the young people who voted in the Make Your Mark ballot but to the country as a whole. All of us in Parliament are very proud of you.

Today marks the end of UK Parliament Week, which has seen more than 1 million people across the UK explore what democracy means to them, which is amazing. Everyone's voice must be heard, and it can have real impact. It was the determination of young people that led to the Government agreeing to fund free menstrual products in secondary schools. Public engagement really can lead to a more inclusive society, so please do not lose the passion that you have shown today.

We have also heard speeches today about the anniversary of Peterloo and political reform. It is important to remember this long history as we head towards another general election. Of course, you already know what I am going to say next: you can only influence the UK Parliament if you engage with it in some way. I am sure that most of you who have a vote will already have registered, but if not please do so and use it. If you are not yet old enough to have a vote, please spread the word, tell your friends and family, take to social media, write a blog—lobby absolutely everybody in your network about the importance of having their say.

I would like us to thank a few groups of people. First, I want us to thank our Chairs today. It was Lindsay Hoyle's first public engagement as Speaker of the House of Commons. Thanks go to Lindsay and Eleanor for facilitating the debates and ensuring that we heard all your views. Let us have a round of applause, please.

I also want to thank colleagues across Parliament who have made this sitting possible. There are loads of people and I will not be able to mention them all by name. They include colleagues who work as Doorkeepers, in the broadcasting and the media teams, as Clerks, for *Hansard*, in catering, visitor services, security and, of course, the Library. Most of all, I thank colleagues in our education and engagement team in participation—we have Emma and Michelle sitting up here.

I cannot name everybody, but I would like to take the opportunity of standing at the Dispatch Box to mention one man who has really made a difference to our engagement work in Parliament. When our head of education and engagement joined us a little less than five years ago, UK Parliament Week was still quite new. It was a great innovation set up by other colleagues. In 2016 there were just over 300 events and activities, reaching about 25,000 people, which at the time we were quite proud of. This year there are over 11,000 activities, reaching 1.2 million people in 47 countries. This person has achieved that through an absolute determination to transform our engagement work in Parliament, by being really good at working with colleagues across Parliament and beyond, and by breaking through a bit of organisational red tape—we do have some of that in Parliament. He is an absolutely inspiring role model. So it is goodbye from me, and let us say thank you to everyone who made today happen, and a special thanks to Mr David Clark. [*Applause.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Penny, for all you have done to make today happen. I call Farah Khan.

Farah Khan (South East): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank Penny for highlighting so many thank yous. I would like to thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Mr Speaker, for chairing our debates and allowing us to contribute, to show our passion, logic and understanding. I thank my fellow MYPs for showing their passion and for showing that we can make change and stand together. Let me express to you that those are qualities that politicians should possess—qualities that we have all seen in MYPs today.

I congratulate and commend my fellow MYPs for their incredible, outstanding efforts and contributions throughout the whole Make Your Mark process and their local campaigns and initiatives, and for their teamwork and camaraderie every single day, throughout every task and campaign that comes our way. Today, we have once again shown that we are change-makers and great people in the making. Well done.

Thank you, fellow MYPs, for proving stereotypes wrong and demonstrating that we are not apathetic as young people—we are here today. You have shown that there is care in politics, proving that we are accepting and diverse in every single way. Look around you—many people say that but I actually want you to look around. We are diverse in every single way. We all present passion for change, politics and democracy. Thank you, MYPs, for proving to all viewers of the proceedings today and to the world that we as young people are here for the greater good, to make change, inspire and make this world a better place. Thank you MYPs for proving that we can make decisions and co-operate, and that we can and do compromise to present unity.

Thank you, MYPs, for showing that we are not defiant, nor deviant nor uninformed on current affairs. Fellow MYPs, we are an inspiration to so many young people. We give young people a voice and we represent our constituencies. We make them proud, show their opinions and represent them. We show that their voices matter, like the Peterloo campaigners did, and for which they lost their lives. They say that change starts with you. We have shown that today. I thank my fellow Members of the Youth Parliament who spoke about political reform and the Peterloo massacre, which deeply touched me. I took part in the 200th anniversary in Manchester city centre and made a speech about why they lost their lives.

Throughout the trials, tribulations and turbulence of the struggles, there were always young people who stayed strong and fought for what they believed in. If they believed in something, they stuck by their cause until they saw change occur. I hope we will take on the same initiative and stick by a cause that we believe in. Members of the Youth Parliament, never stop speaking out and up for what you believe in, unless you see that cause become a reality. To all the young people following today's proceedings, I say never silence your voice. I remind this country's key decision makers that throughout the trials and tribulations that my fellow Members of the Youth Parliament have highlighted today—especially the Peterloo massacre—it was very important to listen to and value the voices of young people, and it still is. I am sure you guys would agree that today that principle is more important than ever.

I thank the House of Commons staff, particularly the Doorkeepers, the UK Parliament education and engagement team, and the Library team who produced research reports for us. I also thank the British Youth Council, which actively encourages us, Youth Voice, and the leadership who provided this platform today for us to debate and engage with politics and the voices of young people.

As we head home, we should be thinking about what we are going to do to work on the national campaign that will be announced soon, and about the other incredibly important issues we have spoken about. To see changes happen, we must stand up for them and keep working on them with our communities, local politicians and local authorities, to provide young people with a voice and an opportunity to make change. It all starts with you, Members of the Youth Parliament: let us make the national campaign a huge success, so that we can make change together.

I know you all want me to finish, so I shall. As you all know, we are now in purdah leading up to the general election on 12 December, so all images, footage, media and information will be released on 13 December. Thank you, Youth Parliament.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. We now have the results of the votes, which are as follows. For the subjects that are England only—that is, the devolved matters—“Mental Health” got 69 votes; “Curriculum to Prepare Us for Life” got 86 votes; and “Put an end to Knife Crime” got 87 votes. *[Applause.]* Those passionate speeches on putting an end to knife crime put that one just ahead.

On the UK-wide issues, I remind you that the winning UK-wide issue will be launched as a petition once Parliament is back in session in the middle of December. The petition will be considered for debate in the House of Commons if 100,000 signatures are received. Looking around at the political activism in the Chamber today, I

must say that I will be very surprised if 100,000 signatures is not massively exceeded. The two subjects on which you were voting were tackling hate crime and protecting the environment. Tackling hate crime got 68 votes and protecting the environment got 179. *[Applause.]* Very well done, everyone. So the proposal that,

“We believe that we have a responsibility to protect the environment from the effects of climate change for the next generation; and that the Government should look towards carbon neutral alternatives”, will be put as a petition and hopefully will be debated in this Chamber by the newly elected Parliament after the middle of December.

I remind BYC support workers, guests and parliamentary staff to vote also in respect of the Paul Boskett memorial awards. Please pass your votes for best debate lead speech and best Back-Bench contribution to British Youth Council staff.

Before we adjourn, may I extend thanks to those who facilitated today? Thank you, members of the British Youth Council and Parliament’s education and engagement department for organising today’s sitting. Thanks to Phil Howse and his team of Doorkeepers for ensuring its smooth running. *[Applause.]* I must tell you, Members of the Youth Parliament, that it is the Doorkeepers who always know what is going on here when nobody else does, and we rely on them. I also thank the Clerks at the Table who have diligently upheld procedure and the Deputy Sergeant at Arms for ensuring our safety. They can all have a round of applause. *[Applause.]*

Finally, I thank all of you for your passionate speeches, your interest and your clear dedication to upholding democracy and freedom. Somebody said earlier that there was nothing he was afraid of except those who deny what is really happening. Well, my fear for the future is much diminished today when I see your generation coming forward and acting the way you are, and I wish you all the very best in all that you do. I hope to see you here in future. Order, order.

Youth Parliament adjourned at 4.07 pm

