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Clean Energy Superpower Mission

Volume 752: debated on Thursday 18 July 2024

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Before I call the Secretary of State, I note that there is disappointment from the Opposition that the statement was not provided in time. The statement was not provided to my office in time either. I know we want to set off in the right way. I am sure that the officials will make note when they arrive that we need to make sure that statements are provided on time. That was meant to be four minutes past the hour. I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to ensure that it never happens again.

⌚ 11.37am

[The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero >](#)

(Edward Miliband)

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With permission, I would like to make a statement about the Government's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. This Government were elected two weeks ago. Since then, we have lifted the onshore wind ban in England, which had been in place since 2015; consented more than 1.3 GW of solar projects, powering the equivalent of almost 400,000 homes; established the 2030 mission control centre in my Department under Chris Stark to plan and deliver our mission; and established under the Chancellor a national wealth fund to create good clean energy jobs across our country. We are just getting started.

We are moving at this pace for one overriding reason: the urgency of the challenges we face. We have the challenge of our energy insecurity, laid bare by Putin's invasion of Ukraine and paid for by the British people in the worst cost of living crisis in generations. We have the challenge of an economy that does not work for working people, with too few good jobs at decent wages. We have the challenge of the climate crisis—not a future threat, but a present reality. This Government have a driving philosophy: homegrown clean energy can help us tackle all those challenges, including crucially energy security. Today the Climate Change Committee publishes its progress report to Parliament. I thank the interim chair Piers Forster and the interim chief executive James Richardson for their excellent work.

The Committee says in its report:

“British-based renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce vulnerability to volatile global fossil fuel markets. The faster we get off fossil fuels, the more secure we become.”

It is right. That is why making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the five missions of this Government, delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero across the economy.

Today, the committee’s report also lays bare the truth about the last Government. Despite achievements, which I am happy to acknowledge, the report is coruscating about the lurch of recent years. It says that

“last year...the previous Government signalled a slowing of pace and reversed or delayed key policies.”

It goes on:

“the...announcements were given with the justification that they will make the transition more affordable for people, but with no evidence backing this claim.”

It concludes that

“the country is not on track”

to hit our 2030 international target of 68% emissions reductions. Indeed, it says:

“Our assessment is that only a third of the emissions reductions required...are currently covered by credible plans.”

That is our inheritance for a target to be achieved in just five years.

I will respond formally to the committee in the autumn and, as part of that, I have asked my Department to provide me with a thorough analysis of its findings, but I can tell the House today that we will hold fast to our 2030 clean power mission and our nationally determined contribution, because it is the right thing to do for our country.

Today, I set out our next steps. First, onshore wind is one of the cheapest sources of power that we have. To those in the House who claimed they were protecting communities with the onshore wind ban, let us be clear: they have undermined our energy security and set back the fight against the climate crisis. That is why in the first 72 hours of this Government we lifted the ban, which today I confirm formally to the House. Under the onshore wind ban, the pipeline of projects in England shrank by 90%.

Over a year ago, the last Government’s net zero tsar Chris Skidmore, whom I pay tribute to, made a recommendation of an onshore wind taskforce to drive forward projects. The last Government ignored it; we will implement it. The taskforce will work with developers to rebuild the pipeline of projects.

Secondly, solar power is among the cheapest forms of power that we have. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I are determined that we have a rooftop revolution. We must use the rooftops of our country for solar far better than we do at the moment. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister and I are clear that rooftop solar should play an important role, where appropriate, as part of the future standards for homes and buildings. The solar road map—we have been waiting for it for 18 months—will be published soon, with greater ambition. I have reconvened the solar taskforce to deliver that objective.

As we face up to the challenge of the energy transition, we must also plan for how we use land in this country to ensure a proper balance between food security, nature preservation and clean energy. After dither and delay under the previous Government, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary will publish a land use framework working in tandem with our spatial energy plan.

I also assure the House that communities will continue to have a say on any proposals in their area. It is important for this Government that where communities host clean energy infrastructure, they should directly benefit from it. But we will not carry on with a position where the clean energy we need does not get built and the British people pay the price.

Credible external estimates suggest that ground-mounted solar used just 0.1% of our land in 2022. The biggest threat to nature and food security and to our rural communities is not solar panels or onshore wind; it is the climate crisis, which threatens our best farmland, food production and the livelihoods of farmers. The Government will proceed not on the basis of myth and false information, but on evidence. Every time, the previous Government ducked, delayed and denied the difficult decisions needed for clean energy, that made us less secure, raised bills and undermined climate action. No more.

Thirdly, offshore wind will be the backbone of our clean energy mission. Allocation round 5, overseen by the last Government, was a catastrophe for the industry, with no offshore wind contracts awarded. The upcoming round is a critical test. We will get this crucial industry back on its feet. By the beginning of August, I will report back on the budget for AR6 to ensure that as much clean, home-grown energy as possible gets built while ensuring value for money.

Our fourth step is the Great British Energy Bill announced in the Gracious Speech. I am extremely proud that this is the first Bill for decades that will enable us to establish a UK-wide publicly owned energy generation company. The truth is that there is already widespread public ownership of energy in Britain, but by foreign Governments. We have offshore wind farms in the UK owned by the Governments of Denmark, France, Norway and Sweden through state-owned companies. Those Governments know that a publicly owned national champion is part of a modern industrial strategy and generates a return for taxpayers, crowding in, not crowding out, private investment. For too long, Britain has opted out and lost out. Today, we say: no more.

Great British Energy, headquartered in Scotland, will invest in home-grown clean energy to increase our energy independence, create good jobs with strong trade unions and tackle the climate crisis. It will invest in technologies such as nuclear, offshore wind, tidal, hydrogen and carbon capture, and ensure a just transition for our oil and gas communities. GB Energy will also oversee the biggest expansion of community energy in British history through our local power plan. The Government believe in the ownership of British assets by the British people, for the benefit of the British people. Following the people's verdict at the general election, I hope that this is a patriotic mission that the whole House can get behind.

I have seen 19 years of debates on climate and energy in this House. The clean energy transition represents the biggest transformation of our economy for 200 years, and it is massively challenging. We have been at our best as a country, and as a House, when we have worked together for the sake of the national interest. I pay tribute to people of all parties who have been champions of this agenda over the past 14 years: Baroness May, who legislated for net zero; the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), who oversaw the growth of offshore wind; Caroline Lucas; and on the Labour Benches, my friend Alan Whitehead.

One of my early decisions was to re-establish the role of the Secretary of State as the lead climate negotiator in my Department, because we can only protect future generations with strong action at home and leadership abroad. Next week in London I will host the President of this year's COP29 in Azerbaijan. He will be joined by the Presidents of COP28 and COP30. I have invited the President of COP 26, Lord Sharma, who presided with such distinction, to join our discussions. This is a sign of how I intend to go on—working with people of all parties and none in this national endeavour. That is what the British people have a right to expect of us. As the Prime Minister rightly says, "Country first, party second." That is more true on this issue than any other. This Government will act at pace and work with anyone who shares our mission. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker >

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I call the shadow Secretary of State.

⌚ 11.46am

Claire Coutinho >

(East Surrey) (Con)

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I would like to put on the record my disappointment not to get the statement in good time. I know that the right hon. Gentleman will want to provide us with the same courtesy that we tried to provide him when we were in government. That being said, I congratulate him on his return to government. I was sad not to see more of him during the election campaign, particularly because our ability to secure enough cheap energy will be crucial to this nation's success in the decades ahead. I would also like to put on record my thanks to the officials he will now work with.

I wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his endeavour, but energy will be this Government's big test. They talk a good game on growth, but the Secretary of State's energy policy is their greatest liability. In government, we built more offshore wind than any other country bar China. We set out the largest expansion of nuclear power in 70 years. We said that, yes, we will need oil and gas in the decades ahead, as the Climate Change Committee has said, and we should use British oil and gas where needed. We are in a global race for energy, and demand will be higher in the years ahead because of data and artificial intelligence.

If the right hon. Gentleman's plans to decarbonise the grid by 2030 are in place, we need to know what they will do to people's energy bills, our energy security and our reliance on the current dominant player for cables, batteries and critical minerals—China. He is happy to quote the Climate Change Committee, but it also acknowledged that we will need oil and gas well into 2050. He must answer: where would he like that to come from?

When it comes to quotes, he should consider some from the business world who have commented on his policy, such as the chief executive of Mitsubishi Power, who said that his plans would require a “huge sacrifice” by the country, citing the costs of the Secretary of State's approach. The chief executive of Ineos said that his approach to energy was “absurd”, leaving us dependent on imports of foreign fuels with higher emissions and doing nothing for the climate. Even the GMB said that his plans were “unviable” and would lead to power cuts, blackouts and enormous cost. Unite has said that the Government's plans for the North sea would turn oil and gas workers into the coalminers of their generation.

The right hon. Gentleman must answer why he would like to import gas with much higher emissions. How many jobs will be lost from his plans? How much investment into the new technologies of the future, such as hydrogen, carbon capture and offshore wind, will be lost? Will he meet those workers and explain to them what will happen to their livelihoods?

During the election, the right hon. Gentleman claimed that he would lower bills and save families £300. However, those numbers are already in the savings, and no one on his side can set out the cost of his plans to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Who will pay for those network costs? What will they do to people's standing charges, which were already too high?

The right hon. Gentleman also, I think, commented on having a say in terms of communities. The energy infrastructure he will need, and the fact that he wants to go further and faster, will have a huge impact on rural communities. Their concerns must be addressed. As I set out, the plans for our energy cannot come at the expense of our food or national security.

In his statement, the right hon. Gentleman accused me of dither, but as he will know from his officials, in at least one of the cases he has signed off I had already instructed some time ago that I was minded to reject it, and that paperwork was being prepared. He must set out urgently what his criteria will be. In one case, he overturned an expert examining authority. In another case, he signed off a solar farm which will be 40% on our best and most versatile agricultural land. Did he know that was the case? If so, what was his basis for finding that acceptable? Will he continue our efforts to build more solar on rooftops? I think he mentioned that he would reconvene the solar taskforce. I hate to tell him, but it had never been disbanded and we were due to publish that work. So, I would like to know what date he will be able to publish that work.

In conclusion, the Secretary of State's party won the election and promised change, but he was not on show during that campaign to answer these critical questions of how he was going to provide that change and what it will mean for the country. What will his plans mean for the price of electricity? What will they mean for our ability to keep the lights on? What will they mean for struggling families' bills, for our economy, and for the livelihoods of oil and gas workers? What will they mean for our reliance on China? For all that the Labour Government talk about growth, they will not be able to deliver on that with the Secretary of State's plans for energy. I hope that in the months ahead he will set out some of that detail to be examined.

Edward Miliband >

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May I start by congratulating the right hon. Lady on her recent engagement? I wish her and her fiancé all the best for the future. We may disagree on some issues, but I believe this Government and the right hon. Lady can at least share a belief in long honeymoons. [Laughter.]

On the right hon. Lady's response, I have to say that I was disappointed. The lines were very, very familiar. That is because they were the lines she has used for the last year. And here she comes today to the House and repeats the lines as if the intervening meteorite has not hit the Conservative party: the worst election result in 200 years for her party. The truth, as sensible Conservatives know, is that the lurch she worked on a year ago with the former Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), was an electoral disaster for the Conservative party—the lurch away from climate action. What we saw in her statement is the classic dilemma for the Conservative party, which we will see played out, I hope, for many long years of Opposition. The dilemma is do they go the Reform route to be climate deniers, or do they actually re-embrace climate—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker >

Order. Can I just say that I do not need any advice? I will decide whether it is a question. It is an answer, actually.

Edward Miliband >

On the points the right hon. Lady made, there is a fundamental issue, which is that unless we drive for clean energy—this is what the Climate Change Committee said; I strongly recommend that right hon. and hon. Members read it—we will end up energy insecure. We had the worst cost of living crisis in generations because of our exposure to fossil fuels, both domestically and internationally, set and sold on the world market. Unless we drive for clean energy, we will end up paying more for energy. The House would not know that from what she said about our 2030 target. She had a target when she was in government of 95% clean power by 2030. Of course, targets did not matter for the previous Government, because they were always miles away from reaching them.

As for the North sea, we set out our manifesto position, which is not to issue licences to explore new fields but to keep existing fields for their lifetime. Here is the truth of the conversation that we must have. The fate of North sea oil and gas communities is defined by these questions. Do we drive forward the clean energy of the future? Have we a plan for carbon capture and storage? Have we a plan for hydrogen? Have we a plan for offshore wind? The Conservatives had no such plans, so we will take no lectures on just transitions from them.

The right hon. Lady had other lines that were a rehearsal of the election. Let me say this to her, on the solar question. She referred to one particular planning decision, and I do think she has a degree of brass neck. She criticised me for overturning the planning authority. I am in a quasi-judicial role, so I will be careful about what I say, but she had this in her Department for a year. She could have agreed with the planning authority and rejected the application, but she chose not to do so. That is the reality.

In my experience, when you lose a general election a period of reflection is in order, and I say to Conservative Members that they need to reflect long and hard on the signals that they sent in this election. Their climate lurch was a disaster—a disaster for them electorally, but, much more important to me, a disaster for the country. Under this Government, Britain is back, open for business and climate leadership.

Bill Esterson >

(Sefton Central) (Lab)

It is great to see you back in the Chair, Mr Speaker. It is also great to see the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box on this side of the House again. I welcome what he said about the jobs, lower bills, energy security and climate action that lie at the heart of this Government's plans. That is very true in respect of the Liverpool city region, where offshore wind—as he said—will play an important and increasing role in our energy future, along with onshore wind, solar power, hydrogen, carbon capture and nuclear energy. However, we also have exciting plans for tidal energy in the region, and I hope he can confirm that it will form a part of what he wants to achieve through the plans that he has announced.

Edward Miliband >

My hon. Friend has long been an eloquent advocate for the role that business can play in generating the clean energy of our future and generating prosperity. I can absolutely confirm that we want to embrace the widest range of technologies. Obviously we must ensure that that gives value for money, but what I always say on these occasions is that the climate crisis and the energy security challenge are so big for us as a country that we must embrace every form of technology at our disposal, because that is the only way in which we will succeed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker >

Order. May I just gently say that these exchanges must finish at 1 pm? I hope we can help each other along the way, but first I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Wera Hobhouse >

(Bath) (LD)

I welcome the new Secretary of State to his place. I share his passion for climate action. Let me add, however, that next time he makes a statement we will need our copies in better time than was the case today.

There is no doubt that the best route to affordable energy is renewables, but under the former Government renewable projects faced long delays and costs have skyrocketed. Indeed, that Government's record on renewables was absolutely miserable. Our electricity demand is expected to double by 2050, and we must make upgrading our grid infrastructure a major priority. The Government will know that one of the biggest challenges will be to bring communities behind hosting the big infrastructure changes needed for the grid expansion, and to cope with the huge landscape transformation. How will they secure public consent?

As the Secretary of State said, to achieve our legally binding targets we also need a "rooftop solar revolution", which will include introducing stronger incentives for households to install solar panels and ensuring a fair price for energy that they sell back to the grid. Will the Government work on those incentives with the Liberal Democrats?

We Liberal Democrats acknowledge the new approach taken by this new Government, and I look forward to working constructively with the Secretary of State to achieve our very ambitious targets.

Edward Miliband >

May I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker?

I welcome the hon. Lady's questions; we worked together on these issues when we were in opposition. Let me deal with her two substantive points. On the question of public consent, this is absolutely something that we need to do, and I see it in three ways. First, communities need a say. Secondly, communities need benefit. Communities are providing a service to the country when they host clean energy infrastructure, so there needs to be benefit for those communities. Thirdly, this is a debate that we will have to have, and I am afraid the last Government did not grasp the nettle on this issue.

We are going through a massive change in our economy. If we do not build the grid or roll out solar, we will be poorer as a country and we will absolutely expose ourselves to future cost of living crises. I look forward to receiving as much support as possible from the Liberal Democrats, and indeed from all Members of this House, in making the case to people. We have to go out and make the case, as I think happened in the 1950s when we will built the grid. If we do not make the case, we will leave ourselves exposed as a country, and it is the British people who will pay the price. I completely concur with the hon. Lady on rooftop solar.

Mr Clive Betts >

(Sheffield South East) (Lab)

I welcome my right hon. Friend back to his position on the Front Bench, and I particularly welcome his reference to hydrogen. I know he has been to visit ITM Power in my constituency. When will an announcement be made about the chosen two technologies to pursue with small modular reactors? Will he give an assurance that whichever firms are picked, they will have to ensure that a very high percentage of the SMRs are built in this country by UK firms, such as Sheffield Forgemasters in my constituency? That will create well-paid jobs as well as clean energy.

Edward Miliband >

I definitely concur with what my hon. Friend says about ITM Power—an incredibly impressive company that I have visited. I also concur with him on the SMR programme. Our manifesto made it clear that we support new nuclear, including at Sizewell, and we also support the SMR programme. Part of our challenge is to examine the legacy left to us by the last Government, but he should be in no doubt about my absolute support for the SMR programme. It is important, and we will strive to keep to the timetable set out.

Dame Harriett Baldwin >

(West Worcestershire) (Con)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his role, but he has been quite political in his replies. I gently point out that in West Worcestershire, fewer people voted Labour in this election than in the last election or the one before. I wonder whether he has ever visited the beautiful landscapes of West Worcestershire. The Malvern hills and Bredon hill are some of the most treasured landscapes in our land. What parameters is he going to put around the building of pylons, wind farms and solar farms across that beautiful landscape?

Edward Miliband >

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I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As with any planning decisions, there are clear parameters in the legislation on the consultation that needs to take place with local communities. I gently point out to her that, nine years ago, the last Government banned onshore wind in England for some of the reasons that she set out. I thought that was a mistake at the time, and it turned out to be even more of a mistake than I thought, because it exposed us to energy insecurity. We have to make judgments as Members of this House. Given the scale of the climate crisis, the energy insecurity and the energy security threat that we face, do we believe that we need to build infrastructure? I happen to believe that we do—yes, with community consent; yes, with community benefit; and yes, with the planning rules that I have set out.

Martin McCluskey >

(Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West) (Lab)

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I congratulate the Secretary of State on his new position. He was lucky enough to visit my constituency during the election campaign and to visit the port of Greenock, where he saw the great potential that exists for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West to contribute to the Government's clean energy mission. What plans does he have to ensure that every part of the country, including in Scotland, can make a contribution? What message does he have for my constituents who are looking to the Government to make an investment in our ports and our marine assets?

Edward Miliband >

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My hon. Friend is an incredibly eloquent advocate for his port, which I was delighted to visit during the election campaign. He makes such an important point: for an island nation looking to take advantage—in terms of jobs as well as generation—of the opportunities of offshore wind, including floating offshore wind, our ports are a massively undervalued and under-invested asset. That is why in our manifesto we set out the largest public investment in ports since privatisation. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it must involve the whole of our United Kingdom. Scotland has a special place in that, as it will become the new headquarters of GB Energy.

Dr Kieran Mullan >

(Bexhill and Battle) (Con)

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In the last Parliament, I was lucky enough to be the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on deep geothermal. I felt that we made good progress in convincing the Government of its merits in helping the climate change transition. Will the new Secretary of State commit to a meeting with the REA—the Association for Renewable Energy and Clean Technology, which acts as the secretariat for the APPG—and me to see what more we can do to convince the new Government of the role that deep geothermal can play?

Edward Miliband >

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In the spirit that I spoke about in my statement, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his work on deep geothermal? It was an outstanding example of how Members of Parliament can advance the role that particular technologies can play. He is a most eloquent advocate for this technology. Among the many places I went during the election campaign, I had the chance to see deep geothermal in Cornwall, which also has the potential for lithium mining: it is a source of critical minerals. Between me and the new Minister for energy—the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), who is going to be a very busy man—we will make sure that we meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to take forward this agenda.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Siobhain McDonagh)

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In line with the Cornwall thread, I call Jayne Kirkham.

Jayne Kirkham >

(Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op)

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Cornish ports such as Falmouth, which the Secretary of State visited during the campaign, have well-advanced plans to reconfigure to service floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea. Cornish further education providers are keen to gear up to provide specialised courses to support the speedy growth of that industry so that young people in Cornwall have the opportunity to train for those high-skilled jobs of the future, but in the past they have struggled because of a lack of Government support. Will the Secretary of State please confirm that support will be available to ports, businesses and educational establishments in Cornwall, to enable them to plug into the vast opportunities opened up by floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea?

Edward Miliband >

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election. May I say that she is a great person to go out on a boat with and that I very much enjoyed our tour?

My hon. Friend makes such an important point about the Celtic sea and about the opportunity that we have. One of the decisions on my desk will be how we make sure that we advance floating wind technology and that we manufacture it in the UK. As Tim Pick, the offshore wind champion, often reminds me, the largest floating wind prototype is off the coast of Scotland, but it is not manufactured in the UK. We need to change that.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

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I call Llinos Medi.

Llinos Medi >

(Ynys Môn) (PC)

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Diolch, Dirprwy Lefarydd—thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Labour manifesto stated that building new nuclear power and small modular reactors will be important in developing new clean power, yet in the King's Speech yesterday there was not a single mention of nuclear power. Can the Secretary of State assure me that developing new nuclear power is still a priority of this Government? What are the specific plans for the Wylfa and Trawsfynydd sites in Wales?

Edward Miliband >

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I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. Great British Energy will of course have a strong interest in nuclear power, working with Great British Nuclear. It is very important for the future. This Government were very clear in our manifesto about the role that nuclear power—both large-scale nuclear and SMRs—can play. I know that the last Government purchased the site for Wylfa, and it is something that we will certainly be looking at.

Rachael Maskell >

(York Central) (Lab/Co-op)

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I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place and congratulate him on his ambition. BioYorkshire is a project—a green new deal—to create 4,000 green-collar jobs and upskill 25,000 workers. It will also create hundreds of spin-offs and new start-up companies focused on chemicals, agriculture and a new generation of fuels. Will he ensure that his Department has early engagement with this green new deal for York and North Yorkshire? Will he ensure that that is part of his energy superpower for the future?

Edward Miliband >

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I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing this project to my attention. In a way, the questions from both sides of the House demonstrate the huge potential we have in this area, not just to tackle the climate crisis and energy insecurity but to create the good jobs of the future. I undertake that the Department will want to look closely at her project.

Dr Andrew Morrison >

(South West Wiltshire) (Con)

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What assessment has the new Secretary of State made of the proposal to build an interconnector between Morocco and the UK to bring clean solar and wind energy that could potentially provide 8% of the UK's grid requirements?

Edward Miliband >

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I certainly took an interest in the project when I was in opposition. I have met Xlinks, the company involved. I need to be careful about what I say on these matters, as he will appreciate, but it is certainly a project that my Department will want to consider.

Afzal Khan >

(Manchester Rusholme) (Lab)

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I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He has already shown more ambition and leadership on transitioning away from dirty energy in his 14 days in government than the Tories showed in 14 years. Does he agree that by making the UK a clean energy superpower, we will be able to tackle air pollution, which kills more than 100 people a year in Manchester alone?

Edward Miliband >

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That is the kind of question I like. My hon. Friend makes a serious and important point about air pollution, which is another reason why we need to move away from fossil fuels. In a sense, the tragedy of air pollution is that it is a silent killer. Tens of thousands of people a year die prematurely in our country as a result of air pollution. People would be out on the streets if it were any other issue

but, because it is a silent killer, it is too little noticed. He is absolutely right that this is yet another reason why it is important that we act with speed and transition as fast as possible.

Kit Malthouse >

(North West Hampshire) (Con)

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I am conscious that we do not have a register of interests at the moment so, for the Secretary of State's own protection, it might be helpful if he could tell the House whether he accepted any donations or otherwise during the election campaign that might be declarable.

I want to press the Secretary of State further on protecting the landscape. Eighty per cent of my constituency is in an area of outstanding natural beauty, now rebranded as a national landscape. Can he reassure me that, in their planning decisions, he and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government will respect the notion of protected landscapes? There is a series of solar farm applications in my constituency, some of which are either in or impinge on the area of outstanding natural beauty. The landscape is protected for a reason, and it is important that the Government respect those protections in planning law. I hope he can confirm that that will be the case.

Edward Miliband >

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On the right hon. Gentleman's first question, I am proud to have been supported by the GMB and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers during the election campaign. I think the sums are below the declarable limit, but I am very happy to put that on the record.

As a constituency MP, I understand local people's concerns about planning issues, and we have to take those concerns seriously. We know that not all planning applications are good, and that is the Government's position. At the same time, particularly in the light of what the National Infrastructure Commission has said, it is widely recognised that how the planning process works has delayed the clean energy we need and has made us poorer as a country. This Government are determined to change that.

Brian Leishman >

(Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab)

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I thank the Secretary of State for the constructive manner in which he and the Government have approached the vital issue of the Grangemouth refinery, which is crucial to life in my constituency. Can he confirm that the UK Government will be tenacious and resolute in seeking an industrial future for the Grangemouth site? Will he agree to meet me to discuss potential options for its future?

Edward Miliband >

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I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for being such an eloquent advocate for Grangemouth so early in his time as a Member of Parliament. His counsel, advice and work on this subject have been very important. I have had three conversations with my counterpart in the Scottish Government over the last two weeks, which is a sign of how we intend to continue. We will work across parties and across Government to do all we can. The future of Grangemouth really matters to this Government, and we will leave no stone unturned in working with the unions, the companies and the Scottish Government to do everything we can to secure a viable future for activity on the site and for the communities of Grangemouth.

Pete Wishart >

(Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

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After the King's Speech and this statement, we still do not have a clue about what GB Energy will look like. The Government cannot even tell us where it will be placed, other than within the 30,000 square miles of Scotland. Greg Jackson, the boss of Octopus Energy, has said that if we reformed this absurd energy market through some form of regional pricing structure, everybody in the UK would have cheaper bills and Scotland would have the cheapest energy in Europe. Will the Secretary of State look at that and ensure that he delivers that prospect for everyone in these isles?

Edward Miliband >

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I am slightly disappointed but not surprised by the hon. Gentleman's tone. I would have thought that the Scottish National party would welcome a publicly owned energy generation company located in Scotland—my counterpart in the Scottish Government certainly welcomed it. Let us be absolutely clear that it will be a generator of energy. That is what companies such as Ørsted and Statkraft do. They own power in this country, and we will do the same. These are complex questions, and we definitely need fairness across the United Kingdom when it comes to energy prices. That is what this Government endeavour to deliver.

Nadia Whittome >

(Nottingham East) (Lab)

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I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment and welcome him back to government.

My constituents, and indeed all our constituents, have suffered the worst cost of living crisis in generations, thanks to the Conservative party being in thrall to fossil fuel interests and failing to invest in renewables. Does the Secretary of State agree that we need a publicly owned domestic energy champion that can speed up our transition to green energy, reduce our reliance on volatile international gas markets and cut household bills at the same time?

Edward Miliband >

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My hon. Friend has been an incredibly eloquent advocate on these issues, including in the last Parliament. This is an important point for all parties in the House to reckon with. The energy insecurity case for action on clean energy is totally transformed from when I was Energy Secretary 15 years ago. Why? Partly because Russia's invasion of Ukraine reminds us of what exposure can look like, but it is also because we have seen a 90% fall in the cost of solar and a 70% fall in the cost of offshore wind over the last decade. The old argument that this energy will save us money in the long term but might cost more in the short term has changed. This is the cheapest, cleanest form of energy we can access.

Nick Timothy >

(West Suffolk) (Con)

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There were 1,360 submissions from interested parties against the Sunnica application in West Suffolk, and the technical report recommending against the application is 339 pages long. Has the Secretary of State visited the Sunnica site? How many hours did it take him to read all the submissions and evidence to make his own detailed technical and legal judgment to overrule them?

Edward Miliband >

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Anyone who knows me knows that I am a super-nerd. I take all of my responsibilities, particularly my quasi-judicial responsibilities, incredibly seriously, and I did in all the judgments I made.

Alistair Strathern >

(Hitchin) (Lab)

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My hon. Friends will find it nice referring to my right hon. Friend as the Secretary of State, and I thank him for his statement. His actions over the last few weeks underline the damaging inaction of the past 14 years. The CCC report out today confirms the true extent of the Tories' climate denialism and the way in which it has undermined our ability to deliver on so many important aspects of this agenda.

Does the Secretary of State agree that no less damaging than climate denialism is the climate delivery denialism to which Members in certain parts of this House are now starting to fall back? Can he confirm that this Government will not shy away from some of the tough choices that will have to be made to deliver not only the climate agenda that voters have supported but the energy security we desperately need?

Edward Miliband >

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I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. He draws attention to a fact in the Climate Change Committee report that is worth underlining: we have an internationally set, nationally determined contribution of 68% reductions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. However, the Climate Change Committee said this morning that only a third of the emissions reductions required are covered by credible plans—that is the legacy we have been left. I am determined that we meet those targets, which is why we have to speed up and act in a way that the last Government did not.

My hon. Friend is right about clean energy. As I said earlier, this is a debate that this country will have to have. We can say no to clean energy and to building grids, but that will leave us poorer and more exposed, and mean that we are not doing what is required to tackle the climate crisis. This Government have made their choice; others will have to do so too.

Layla Moran >

(Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his post. I welcome the tone of his statement and I share its ambition. Will he join me in commending the ambitious work of Lib Dem-led Oxfordshire county council, which wants to reach net zero by 2030, and the work of all councils everywhere? They are on the frontline of the climate crisis in our communities. He talks about local people having a say. Does he agree that often the best way for local communities to feel they have that say is through their local councils?

Edward Miliband >

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Characteristically, the hon. Lady makes an important point. To deliver this agenda, we have to get the central-local relationship right, because if we try to deliver it all from the centre we will not succeed. To take the example of improving the appalling state of energy efficiency in our homes, much of that work will have to be delivered by local authorities. That is the right way to do it, and I pay tribute to all the local authorities across the country that are showing ambition in that area.

Rachel Blake >

(Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op)

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I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. The Cities of London and Westminster have a huge contribution to make for the UK to be a clean energy superpower, not just through investment driven from the City of London and innovation driven by businesses across the constituency, but through our residential community energy schemes, such as Aldgate Solar Power, which is a fantastic local co-operative. However, after years of dither and delay by the Conservative Government and the former Conservative council, the Pimlico district heating undertaking is in desperate need of investment. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can make it an exemplar scheme and mitigate the cost for local residents and leaseholders, who may be facing significant costs because of the nature and construction of the heating equipment?

Edward Miliband >

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election. I have worked with her in the past and I know she will be an outstanding Member of Parliament. The Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen, is going to be very busy, but I am sure he will happily meet her to discuss her question. She raises community energy schemes.

I want to emphasise that one thing Great British Energy will deliver is our local power plan, which will work with local communities and local authorities to deliver community energy. One of the answers to the question of how we build public consent for this is community ownership of energy. We want to drive that forward, and that is what the local power plan will be about.

Sir Gavin Williamson >

(Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con)

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I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment. The decisions that the Government have made will see a much more rapid decommissioning of oil and gas in the North sea. How much additional money has he secured from the Treasury to cover the Government's legal costs for that decommissioning, and how much does he think it will cost in total?

Edward Miliband >

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The most important thing is to secure a just transition for those communities, as set out in our manifesto, through £8.3 billion from Great British Energy and over £7 billion from our national wealth fund. The truth is that there is massive debate in the House about licensing. The right hon. Gentleman will not have been at the debate when we discussed these issues, but the difference it makes to how much of our gas demand is produced domestically is that under the old Government—*[Interruption.]* Let me explain. Under the old Government policy, there would have been a 95% reduction in our demand met domestically, but under this Government's policy, it will be 97%. For all the hue and cry from the Opposition, that is the reality.

Perran Moon >

(Camborne and Redruth) (Lab)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his position. Cornwall is one of the most deprived areas of northern Europe. However, we are blessed with vast renewable energy resources, as mentioned earlier: onshore wind, offshore wind, geothermal, tidal, solar and ground source heat technologies, as well as critical minerals, not from China but from Camborne and Redruth. Will the Secretary of State meet me and Cornish colleagues to discuss how GB Energy will be used to realise our renewable energy potential and to transform local Cornish economies?

Edward Miliband >

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My hon. Friend is also a great guy to go on a boat with. As he says, Cornwall and our coastal communities have an incredibly important part to play. Some of the biggest economic challenges we face as a country are in our coastal communities. It is not easy, but if we get this right it will be a massive opportunity, not just for Cornwall but for all our coastal communities, and that is what this Government intend to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Siobhain McDonagh)

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I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon >

(Strangford) (DUP)

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Oh, thank you—you caught me off guard there, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I am so used to being the last one in the House to be called.

I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. I know it has always been his ambition to have the opportunity to have this role. Now he has it, I hope it goes well for him, and we will support him in what he is trying to achieve. With the new Government comes a new way of achieving goals and aims. I represent Strangford, which is a mostly rural constituency. Farming is a way of life and a key part of the economy. It creates thousands of jobs and opportunities, and is key to our future. Green energy and net zero are important for that as well. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the farming community and agrifood needs will be paramount in any effort to achieve a better world for all of us to live in?

Edward Miliband >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. In the last few days, I have sometimes said to people that I feel that I am going back to the job I did 15 years ago, but getting to try and do it better. I am sure Members on the Opposition Benches would agree with that. It is an amazing opportunity and a big responsibility.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the role of rural communities, particularly farming communities. We are determined to get the balance right between food security, nature preservation and clean energy. The truth is that we, as a country, have not thought about the role of our land enough in recent years. We hope that will be driven by the land use framework that will be produced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Melanie Onn >

(Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab)

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I welcome the Secretary of State and his team to their place. He will know that my constituency has benefited hugely from offshore wind, particularly in operations and maintenance, but the critical part of the supply chain has failed to be produced. What does he suggest that Members across the House can do to ensure we get the supply chain right so that my constituents can benefit from that investment?

Edward Miliband >

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I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House. It is fantastic to see her back in her place—I congratulate her. She knows much about this subject through working for RenewableUK when she was outside the House, and she makes an important point. The shadow Secretary of State drew attention to our generation of offshore wind, which we have done well, but it is commonly accepted that we have not done nearly so well in generating the jobs that should come with that. Part of what I will be doing with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business and Trade is developing a proper green industrial strategy, including in the supply chain. That will provide clarity about the plan to ensure that we have not just energy generation, but job generation too.

Carla Denyer >

(Bristol Central) (Green)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his role, and welcome the Government's recognition that public investment must play a substantial role in decarbonising power. I have seen that from my previous career in offshore wind. However, this public investment must not be only about de-risking private sector investment, though some of his colleagues have implied that that would be the principal role of Great British Energy. Will the Secretary of State confirm that Great British Energy will invest in fully publicly owned, or at least majority publicly owned, renewable generation projects, and will not confine itself to taking minority stakes in private sector-led projects that would give it very little control?

Edward Miliband >

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I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. I can confirm that GB Energy will play a role in all kinds of ways, and that we are certainly not restricting it in the way that she suggests. Furthermore, in the constructive spirit of these exchanges, I would ask that the Green party thinks about its commitment to tackling the climate crisis, which we all share, and then thinks about this question of infrastructure. If it wants to tackle the climate crisis, it should know that that simply will not happen if its leading members say no to new energy infrastructure.

Torsten Bell >

(Swansea West) (Lab)

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I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his place. It is very appropriate that he is bringing this level of energy to the debate, and we all hope to see much more of that in the years ahead. It is a big contrast to the previous 10 years of inaction, which has cost us, not just in terms of our energy security, but in wasted opportunity. I wish to touch on one of those opportunities, which is the huge tidal power potential that Britain has in Swansea, and not just in Sefton. Does he agree that it is time to seize that opportunity, rather than waste it?

Edward Miliband >

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I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He was head of policy when I was Leader of the Opposition, and I tended to do what he told me, rather than the other way round, so it is a particular pleasure to see him in his place. He makes such an important point. Tidal is an area where Britain is in the lead, but we want to go further and faster, as it has huge potential for our country.

Robbie Moore >

(Keighley and Ilkley) (Con)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his place, but I have to say that the Government's disastrous decision to industrialise our highly productive, good agricultural land by approving three huge solar farms clearly demonstrates their unwillingness to listen to the concerns of local rural communities; it runs roughshod over them and their ability to have their say. It is also hugely detrimental to food security. Can he explain to the House how he will look the farming community in the eye and explain his decision, as well as the Government's lukewarm words on food security being national security?

Edward Miliband >

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I am afraid that we have to conduct these debates on the basis of fact, not myth. Some 0.1% of our land, and around that amount of agricultural land, is being used for solar panels. We cannot proceed on the basis of myth. The hon. Gentleman talks about the farming community. Farmers want this. The National Farmers Union has supported this decision. Of course we will work with local communities, but every time an Opposition Member gets up and opposes clean energy, they are saying to the British people, "We are going to make you poorer. We are going to make Britain more energy insecure, and we are not going to tackle the climate crisis."

Imran Hussain >

(Bradford East) (Lab)

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I thank the Secretary of State for setting out his very clear strategy. Will he confirm whether projects such as the new hydrogen hub in Bradford will be at the forefront of that strategy? Will he guarantee proper investment in places such as Bradford, so that we can grow and become a global leader in this sector, as well as generate well-paid and sustainable jobs?

Edward Miliband >

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I really welcome my hon. Friend's advocacy on this issue. The hydrogen economy is a really important part of our future. It is yet another example of where we can succeed as a country and generate good jobs and good wages. I look forward to engaging with him on these issues.

Mr Alistair Carmichael >

(Orkney and Shetland) (LD)

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May I take the Secretary of State back to the question of tidal power generation? If he speaks to the developers in the sector, they will tell him that they need two things to keep growing the sector. They need an expanded pot for the ringfenced allocation in the next allocation round, and they need an ambitious deployment target for the sector. Can we have an early announcement on that? If he really wants to understand the potential of marine renewables, he needs to get himself up to the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney. He is very welcome there at any time, but he might want to come in the summer, while the days are still long.

Edward Miliband >

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I thank the right hon. Member for that invitation, and I will very much consider it, because I care a lot about this area. Obviously, I have to make decisions, in a certain capacity, about allocation round 6, but I have heard what he has said.

Blair McDougall >

(East Renfrewshire) (Lab)

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I welcome the Secretary of State and his excellent team to their new roles. Can I look forward to welcoming them back to Whitelee wind farm, which he has been to many times before, to see how the largest onshore wind farm in the UK is contributing not only energy, but to the community and its life?

I declare an interest as the outgoing chair of the Uyghur Campaign in the UK. The Secretary of State will be aware that much of the polysilicon used in solar manufacturing is sourced from the Uyghur region, where Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are routinely used as slave labourers. The expansion of solar that the Secretary of State is envisioning gives us enormous economic leverage in the UK, and I wonder how he intends to use that leverage to get the industry to clean up its supply chains and seek alternative sources of polysilicon.

Edward Miliband >

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Let me welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He raises a very important issue. There were some standards put in place by the previous Government, but I think that we should take this issue incredibly seriously. I look forward to discussions with him on these issues.

Lee Anderson >

(Ashfield) (Reform)

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The Secretary of State speaks very passionately about GB Energy. I remind him that just a few years ago, the Labour-controlled Nottingham city council had its own energy company called Robin Hood Energy, but this was Robin Hood with a modern twist: it robbed from the poor and gave to the rich, and cost the taxpayer about £50 million. Can the Secretary of State tell the House from that Dispatch Box how much GB Energy will cost the taxpayer?

Edward Miliband >

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First of all, let me explain to the hon. Gentleman that Robin Hood Energy was a supply company; this is a generation company. Robin Hood was a retailer, so it is different, but I have to say that I am surprised at the position that he takes. I thought his party was in favour of publicly owned energy. I think it produced lots of videos on social media to that effect.

Adam Joge >
(Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab)

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The Secretary of State knows from his recent visit to my constituency just how important energy security is for the people of Newcastle-under-Lyme. I am just sorry that there was no boat. Over 14 years of the Tories, families' bills have been pushed up, and we were left at the mercy of Putin after his invasion of Ukraine. May I urge the Secretary of State to get to work quickly, following his excellent return to the job—he is the comeback kid—so that we can cut bills and give my constituents the energy security that they deserve?

Edward Miliband >

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I think to be called a kid at my time of life is stretching things a bit, but I am nevertheless grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution. He makes the important point that huge opportunities exist right across our country. The United States has used the Inflation Reduction Act to seize those opportunities. Our economy is smaller, but we intend to seize those opportunities with a proper, modern industrial policy.

Sarah Dyke >
(Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. Somerset is home to many ground-mounted solar farm developments. Although I fully support the significantly increasing amount of electricity that we generate from renewables, I believe that the communities that host the infrastructure should receive compensation. The Government's recent policy statement on onshore wind agreed with that, so will community benefit funds be mandated for new solar farm developments?

Edward Miliband >

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The hon. Lady raises an important issue. The previous Government had a whole series of consultations out on community benefit. We will respond to those, but I want to be very clear that I believe that when a community takes on the responsibility of hosting clean energy infrastructure, it should benefit from it.

Anneliese Midgley >
(Knowsley) (Lab)

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I welcome my right hon. Friend to his role, and I welcome his ambition. During the general election campaign, so many residents in Knowsley told me that they were struggling with the cost of living crisis and rising energy bills. Can the Secretary of State confirm that Great British Energy will allow us to take back control of our system, give us energy security, and crucially lower bills for families?

Edward Miliband >

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Let me welcome my hon. Friend to her place, and congratulate her on her election; she will be a great Member of Parliament. She raises such an important issue. More than 3 million people are in fuel poverty in our country. One thing that this Government will do that the last Government did not is demand that landlords raise the standard of their accommodation to a proper energy

performance certificate standard C by 2030. That will make a dent in this issue, but the House should be in no doubt about our ambition to cut that number of 3.2 million as much as possible in the five years of this Parliament.

James Wild >

(North West Norfolk) (Con)

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Plans for 90 miles of pylons from Lincolnshire to my North West Norfolk constituency and new substations are strongly opposed by local communities. Will the Secretary of State commit to a review of network technologies, and consider a presumption in favour of underground or offshore proposals?

Edward Miliband >

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I will look at all proposals, but I think the hon. Gentleman knows that underground cables cost six to 10 times more; that is why the last Government did not agree to them. [\[Official Report, 2 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 1WC.\] \(Correction\)](#) If part of our challenge is to cut bills for people, that is not a sustainable solution for the future. I am sympathetic to all MPs who raise issues on behalf of their constituents, but I gently say again to him that if we want to avoid a repeat of the cost of living crisis, if we want to tackle the climate crisis, and if we want energy security, we will have to build the grid in our country.

Henry Tufnell >

(Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab)

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I welcome the comments of the Secretary of State, which are incredibly encouraging for communities such as mine in west Wales. Throughout the campaign, I heard again and again the demand from local people, from Pembroke Dock to Milford Haven, for well paid, secure jobs in the industries of the future. In the port of Milford Haven we have a huge opportunity, particularly in the area of floating offshore wind. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the opportunities for my constituency, and how we can overcome the barriers to investment in local jobs?

Edward Miliband >

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I was delighted to visit the port of Milford Haven during the election campaign. There is an interesting issue here: the £1.8 billion investment that this Government are making in our ports will hopefully allow us to invest in floating offshore wind at more ports than the last Government were able to. I cannot make promises about particular ports from the Dispatch Box, but this is so important, because if we are to get the jobs here, we must invest in our port infrastructure.

Greg Smith >

(Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con)

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The Secretary of State referred multiple times to community consent, yet the 6,000 acres of solar installation in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) had no community consent. That sends shivers down the spine of my constituents in and around the villages known as the Claydons, who are looking down the barrel of a 2,100-acre solar installation called Rosefield. That is on top of a proposed battery storage plant next door, and on top of the National Grid wanting to build a brand-new substation to take the thing in; it is the tail wagging the dog. What will change to make community consent a reality?

Edward Miliband >

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What the hon. Gentleman wants for nationally significant projects is community veto.

indicated assent.

Edward Miliband >

The hon. Gentleman nods his head. I will be honest with him: we are not going to give community veto. The last Government did not give it either. There are nationally significant projects that the Government have to make decisions on. Obviously, we have to take into account the views of local communities, but the whole point of decision making on the nationally significant infrastructure programme is that we look at the needs of the nation as well. That is why community benefit is important. If we ask local communities to host clean energy infrastructure, sometimes they will not want it, or sometimes a minority will not want it—I am not making presumptions in this case—and then we should ensure that those communities benefit from it.

Andrew Pakes >

(Peterborough) (Lab)

I welcome the Secretary of State and his team to the Chamber. It is a privilege to make my first contribution in this House on such an ambitious plan. It is ambitious not just on net zero, the climate crisis and energy security, but on jobs and opportunities for young people in places such as mine. In my constituency, Peterborough college is already building a green technology centre to develop new green apprenticeships, and we have plans for a clean energy transition centre. Will the Secretary of State put on record his commitment to working with trade unions, communities, colleges and others, so that we can move from blue-collar to green-collar apprenticeships, and give young people an opportunity to succeed in life as we meet our climate and energy needs?

Edward Miliband >

I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He raises the important question of how we ensure—this issue will be familiar to Members across the House—that we not only have the capacity to generate jobs in clean energy but can meet the skills needs of the country in order to fill them. This is frankly something on which we need to do a lot better as a country. My Department—I will talk about this in the next few weeks—will take on more of a function around looking at the skills needs of the clean energy economy, working with the Department for Education on how we meet them. He raises a crucial point in that context.

Tony Vaughan >

(Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab)

I congratulate the Secretary of State and his team on their recent appointment and thank them for their recent visit to Cheyne Court wind farm in my constituency, which was opened by the Secretary of State in 2009. Dungeness A and Dungeness B in my constituency are former nuclear power stations that are in the process of being decommissioned. Dungeness has the land, infrastructure, grid connections and local expertise that make it well placed for new nuclear. Will the Secretary of State be willing to meet me to discuss how we can harness Dungeness's potential for the local area and the regional community?

Edward Miliband >

I was delighted to visit the Cheyne Court wind farm with my hon. Friend—a wind farm that I opened 15 years ago on my first visit as the Secretary of State. Pictures of how much I have aged between then and now are available on request. He raises a really important issue. He is an important advocate for clean energy, whether in relation to wind power or the potential nuclear programme. Both are important to us.

Richard Burgen >

(Leeds East) (Lab)

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I congratulate the Secretary of State on his position, and on the vigorous start that he has made on this most important of issues facing humanity and the world. I was particularly encouraged to see him put climate diplomacy high on the agenda, and at the heart of the new Cabinet. That is so important, after 14 years of the previous Government's denigration of Britain's role in the world on this most important issue of tackling climate change. Will he further outline to the House the work that he plans to ensure that, unlike in the past 15 years, Britain will be the main player that it needs to be in global co-operation on tackling the threat of climate change?

Edward Miliband >

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I am pleased that my hon. Friend has asked me that question. The world wants to see British leadership, but British leadership starts at home with the power of example. If we do not show that we are acting at home then people say, "You're telling us one thing abroad, but doing something different when it comes to your own domestic situation." The truth is that COP29 in Azerbaijan and crucially COP30 in Brazil will be very important moments. COP30 is when the world has to come to terms with how far off track we are from 1.5°C, and put in our nationally determined contributions for 2035. I look forward to Britain playing as much of a constructive role in those negotiations as we can.

Luke Myer >

(Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab)

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I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. Teesside is perfectly positioned for the green jobs of the future—jobs in hydrogen, clean power and ports—as my right hon. Friend knows from his recent visit to Teesport. Will he meet me and colleagues to ensure that we can bring jobs and investment to Teesside?

Edward Miliband >

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My hon. Friend, who I welcome to his place, makes such an important point about the role Teesside can play. I saw on a recent visit how much potential there is and we look forward to working with him on these issues.

Luke Murphy >

(Basingstoke) (Lab)

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I welcome my right hon. Friend and his team to their place. He had the privilege of visiting Basingstoke college of technology during the election campaign to meet some of the fantastic apprentices and students there. Further to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes), will he commit to working with colleges such as BCOT as he develops the plan for skills and training for the hundreds of thousands of jobs we need to deliver on our ambition of a clean energy superpower?

Edward Miliband >

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I thank my hon. Friend and welcome him to the House. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience on these issues. I enjoyed my visit to Basingstoke. What really came home to me on that visit was young people's enthusiasm for this agenda—not simply because they care about the climate crisis, but because they see this as a potential future for themselves, their friends and their family. I look forward to working with colleges such as his to make that a reality.

Josh Fenton-Glynn >

(Calder Valley) (Lab)

It is great to see my right hon. Friend in his place after over a decade of leadership on this issue, talking about climate change and really making that difference. If we are to be a clean energy superpower, we need to learn from good examples and better practice wherever it is. In Calder Valley, Together Housing is a good example of a housing association that is doing well in putting solar on roofs and taking advantage of microgeneration. However, I am sure he will agree that one problem for those kinds of projects is that the national grid is not up to scratch. Key to being a clean energy superpower is getting a modern national grid. Will he also agree to visit some of Together Housing's projects, which keep bills down and put solar panels on roofs?

Edward Miliband >

I welcome my hon. Friend to his place and congratulate him on his election, and I commend his housing association for what it is doing. He raises one of the biggest issues that the previous Government faced and that this Government face. The flipside of all the Conservative Members saying that they do not want the grid built is what my hon. Friend just said—maybe they should have a conversation. What he is saying is that if we do not build the grid, we cannot get the clean energy and we cannot cut bills for our constituents. I do not say that this is easy, and I do not want to pretend that it is. Certainly the last Government did not find it easy, but we have to decide. To govern is to choose, and our choice is that we believe this clean energy infrastructure needs to be built.

Peter Swallow >

(Bracknell) (Lab)

Last week Bracknell Forest council held a climate change summit, bringing together local businesses, schools and community organisations in my constituency to engage in discussions about how best to face the challenges of climate change. Does the Secretary of State agree that communities are crying out to take part and to be engaged in the clean energy transition?

Edward Miliband >

Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend. He raises an important point that we have not touched on: the role of citizens in this change. My sense is that, while of course there are specific planning issues that people raise about their own communities, the view of many citizens in our country is, "What can I do? What difference can I make?" I think the Government need to do a better job of answering that. That is not nanny-statism, to reassure the Conservatives, but public information about the difference people can make in this incredibly important cause.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Siobhain McDonagh)

Last but not least, I call Laurence Turner.

Laurence Turner >

(Birmingham Northfield) (Lab)

As a recent official of the GMB trade union, which has been mentioned in this statement, I welcome the Secretary of State and his team and officials to their place. How welcome it is to have a change of Government from the record of the last 14 years, with the ducking and delaying of difficult decisions on issues from nuclear to gas storage, and the exclusion for too long of workers' voices from the decisions that affect the energy system. In opposition, my right hon. Friend established an energy transition working group to bring together trade unions and workers' voices at the heart of energy plans. Can he confirm today that continuing that group in government will be an early priority for this new Administration?

I welcome my hon. Friend to this House and thank him for the work we did together in opposition on all these issues. As this is the final question, he ends on a really important point: this Government have a completely different attitude to the role that trade unions can play in the future of our energy system, and we are proud of it. If we are to make the energy transition, including in the North sea, and build a proper industrial policy for the future, we should do what every other self-respecting nation does and have trade unions at the heart of our policymaking and decision making. That is what this Government will do.

Congratulations everybody on getting through that; I am delighted that everybody got to ask their question and I thank the Secretary of State for his responses.