

**Barry Gardiner Shadow Minister (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) (Energy and Climate Change), Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade 5:13 pm, 16th January 2019**

Thank you for your guidance during the debate, Mr Betts. I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend Anna McMorrin, and indeed all my hon. Friends who have spoken so eloquently in the debate.

When the Minister responds, I am confident that she will remind the House that the Government was a progressive voice in Poland. That is true. Along with other members of the High Ambition Coalition, the UK pledged to step up our ambition by 2020. It is easy to be a progressive voice when what is needed is progressive action, but progressive action requires political will. Repeating a promise that every nation made in Paris three years ago does not show political will. What was needed in Katowice was a clear commitment to deliver on the ratchet process that Paris put in place.

The Minister and I have many political differences, but I say to her in all sincerity that if in a few minutes she were to rise and use the platform of this debate to pledge that the UK will reach net zero emissions before 2050, as Labour has committed to do, I would not play politics. I would welcome her announcement publicly, because it is the right thing to do. Of course, it is a pledge that must be backed by a coherent plan, but in my view it is necessary if we are to chart a way that is even remotely compatible with keeping below the 1.5°C threshold.

I also suggest to the Minister that she may care to reflect that there is also a very good political reason for her to make such a pledge. Failing to do so would make a mockery of her bid to host next year's conference of the parties. Labour wholeheartedly supports holding COP 26 here in 2020, but as things stand we have serious reservations about whether the Government are up to the task.

We should look at the condition of the UK's climate diplomacy team, which was referred to earlier. In 2009, under Labour, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had an army of climate staff—277 strong. Seven subsequent years of Tory austerity halved that. Then Boris Johnson became the Foreign Secretary, and the number of officials working full time on climate fell to just 55. I ask the Minister what discussions she has had with the current Foreign Secretary about restoring that workforce of climate diplomats.

Climate diplomacy matters now more than ever. At COP24, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait refused to welcome the IPCC's report. Our climate diplomats should have known that in advance and taken active steps against it. When they finally made their position public, our Government should have offered criticism. They did not, just as they did not when President Trump announced his decision to withdraw from the United Nations framework convention on climate change.

Leadership means speaking out. It also means acknowledging our responsibilities as the nation that ushered in the fossil fuel era. Rich nations like us have evaded calls to support the victims of loss and

damage. Can the Minister tell the House what we, the fifth richest country in the world, are doing to address loss and damage in the most climate-vulnerable nations resulting from our addiction to fossil fuels? That would be climate diplomacy that could genuinely bring about change at a UK COP.

This year the Warsaw international mechanism for loss and damage is up for review. It is the perfect moment for the Government to make us the first developed nation to provide additional financial contributions to address loss and damage. The latest figures show that climate aid reached \$70 billion in 2016—still short of the 2020 target of \$100 billion, which COP24 agreed would rise from 2025.

Will the Minister provide an assurance that the UK will take on its fair share of that increase? Will she confirm that she has had discussions with the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary about how they will increase the UK's contribution towards international climate finance in the next spending review? I am not asking for figures; I am simply asking whether those discussions have taken place in Government. If not, will she accept that they are a necessary precondition to any credible bid by the UK to hold the COP?

Of course, the last thing I want is a trade-off that reduces still further Government finance for tackling climate breakdown here at home. As has been said, investment in our low-carbon economy is at its lowest level in a decade, down 57% in 2017. Will the Minister acknowledge publicly that, according to the independent assessment of the Committee on Climate Change, her clean growth strategy does not get us back on course to meeting the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and will she explain why, for all her protestation about the effectiveness of energy policy not being simply about how much money the Government spends, she still thinks that the 75% capital allowances for the fracking industry are a sensible use of public money?

I ask the Minister not whether she has read the IPCC report—for all our differences, I acknowledge that she is a diligent Minister and know that she will have done—but whether she will state publicly that she agrees with it. Will she explain to the House why, having read it, she can conclude that the Government's current policies constitute a sensible response to the climate crisis that it outlines?

We need radical, transformative action, and we need it now. The IPCC report demanded

“rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society”— a far cry from what the Government are offering.

Denial comes in two packages. I do not accuse the Government of denial of the science, but there is another sort: denial of what it will take to stop climate change. Among the many speeches by world leaders at COP24, I was most affected by the words of the 15-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg:

“We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis.”

Those are the words of the next generation. I hope that the Minister will heed them and act accordingly.