I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to introduce measures to reduce the exposure of children to the marketing of alcohol products; to make provision to establish the permitted content of marketing of alcohol products; and for connected purposes.

About 13 young people will die this week as a result of alcohol, and about 650 this year. Nearly a quarter of all deaths of young people aged between 15 and 24 are caused by alcohol. That is two every day—far more than are killed by knife crime or cancer—yet this tragic loss from alcohol attracts far less by way of a response. These totally avoidable deaths are just the tip of the iceberg and do not begin to represent the full scale of the harm caused by alcohol to children.

Alcohol blights lives, with criminal records as a result of violent and antisocial behaviour, and it results in educational failure. Regretted and unprotected sex raises the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Around 7,500 children are admitted every year to English hospitals alone as a result of acute intoxication, and that figure does not include the carnage in our accident and emergency departments.

There are many contributing factors and no simple solutions. Ultra-cheap alcohol and saturation availability still need to be tackled, but we also need a change in our drinking culture. The Bill aims to tackle one of the root causes of that culture, and there is a clear evidence base to support it. Youth culture is heavily influenced by marketing and our children are saturated by alcohol advertising. Despite the clear evidence of harm—only Denmark and the Isle of Man have higher levels of binge drinking and drunkenness in their schoolchildren—the European school survey demonstrated that our children have the most positive expectations of alcohol of any children in Europe and were the least likely to feel that it might cause them harm.

Where do those positive expectations come from? Let us just look at the scale of marketing in the UK. The estimated spend on alcohol marketing is around £800 million, compared with the Drinkaware trust’s funding by the industry of just £2.6 million. When £307 is spent encouraging drinking for every pound spent promoting sensible behaviour, the results are predictable. The World Health Organisation hit the nail on the head when it said:

"In such a profoundly pro-drinking environment, health education becomes futile."

The Portman Group, one of the main regulators of the industry, would have us believe that it runs a very tight ship and is effective in protecting children. That simply is not true.

Our confusing and inadequate combination of legislation and industry self-regulation is not working. The report on alcohol by the last Health Committee highlighted the fact that 96% of
13-year-olds from a sample of 920 were aware of alcohol advertising in at least five different media, and between 91% and 95% were able to identify masked brands. Nearly half owned alcohol-branded products, such as clothing. Does that matter?

A systematic review of multiple studies looking at the impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on adolescents—a study that reviewed many studies—concluded that increasing exposure to alcohol marketing encourages children to start drinking younger and to drink more when they do. The Academy of Medical Sciences report "Calling Time" showed a consistent correlation between consumption levels by 11 to 15-year-olds and the amount spent on marketing. We can be sure that, if alcohol advertising did not work, the industry would not pay for it.

So many of the possible solutions to our binge-drinking epidemic are incompatible with European law, so it is rather refreshing to hear that France has found a way forward. In 1991, in response to saturation inappropriate marketing, the French introduced a measure called the Loi Evin. This law has been repeatedly challenged in the European courts and has been upheld as

"proportionate, effective and consistent with the Treaty of Rome",

which all Members would agree makes a pleasant change.

Alcohol was a serious problem in France. In 1960 the French were consuming over 30 litres of pure alcohol per capita per year. Consumption is well under half that figure now. I accept that French levels of alcohol consumption were falling before the Loi Evin was introduced, but the French have managed to sustain that decline and the long-term trend continues to be downwards. That is partly because their young people are no longer exposed to a continuous barrage of insinuating and pervasive messages about alcohol.

I am not suggesting a retreat to the nanny state or a ban, but we should aim to protect children, especially as there is clear evidence of their exposure to marketing and the consequent harm. We currently have an absurd situation where advertisers are not supposed to link drinking with social or sexual success or portray drinkers as youthful or vigorous, but they can regularly sponsor major sporting and youth events, such as T in the park. The Bill aims to reduce the exposure of children to the harmful effects of alcohol marketing by setting out what advertisers are allowed to say and where they can say it. Rather than the current confused cocktail of legislation and self-regulatory codes, let us switch to something that works.

The Bill would permit the promotion of alcohol in media that adults use. That would include the print media, where at least 90% of readers are adults rather than children, radio after 9 pm and films with an 18 certificate. It would allow advertising at the point of sale in licensed premises and at traditional producer events, so it would not penalise, for example, west country cider makers or small Scottish distilleries. In these media, advertisers would be permitted only to make factual and verifiable statements about their products, such as alcoholic strength, composition and place of origin. Every advert would also carry an advisory message about responsible drinking or health.

Any other marketing or promotion not specifically permitted would therefore be banned, and this would include television, social media and youth-certified films. The Bill would specifically prevent the growing threat from viral phone marketing and ploys such as "advergames" on the internet, where so-called games are a cover for alcohol marketing. I think we would all agree that those are designed specifically to appeal to young people.
Ofcom in its own research has demonstrated that for every five 24-year-olds who see an alcohol advert on television, there are four 10-year-olds who see the same advert. The industry will claim that these measures will kill off sport and culture, and that advertising is designed only to persuade people to switch brands. The same claim was made before the tobacco advertising ban. I point out that France has managed a World cup and a European cup without any help from alcohol sponsorship.

Across the channel, the Loi Evin is backed up by heavy penalties which have been imposed by the courts and now act as a significant deterrent. May I ask that we stop putting the fox in charge of the chickens and have a clear statutory code to protect our children? The Government could adopt this measure very quickly. I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Mr Vaizey in the Chamber today. I call on him to meet me to discuss further how we could implement the measure in the Government's alcohol strategy.

The coalition has staked a great deal on talking about outcomes. If we are serious about outcomes such as reducing health inequality, reducing violent crime and domestic violence, improving the life chances of our children and reducing teenage pregnancy, we must stop talking to the drinks industry, with its vested interest in increasing drinking, and start listening to those with real expertise in preventing alcohol-related deaths. Not so much big society, perhaps, as big sobriety.

Philip Davies (Shipley, Conservative)

It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend Dr Wollaston that I object to the Bill in principle and in practice. Despite her best efforts to suggest otherwise, it is clearly an attempted extension of the nanny state, of which we have had far too much already. It is gesture politics to try to appease the health zealots in this country, most of whom cannot be appeased anyway.

I accept my hon. Friend's point that the British Medical Association found that 96% of 13-year-olds are aware of alcohol advertising. However, I dispute the inference that that leads them to go out and drink. After all, many 13-year-olds are probably well aware of car adverts, but that does not mean that they all go out driving as a result of watching them. All the research has shown the exact opposite. When young people were asked what was most likely to influence people under the age of 18 to drink alcoholic drinks regularly, 67% said the influence of friends, 56% said the availability of drink, just 5% said TV advertising, and only 3% said sponsorship.

If we accept this policy, where will it end? All sorts of products are bad for us if taken in excess. Cream cakes are undoubtedly bad for us if we partake of them in excess, as are pizzas, chocolates and curries. Does my hon. Friend propose to come back at a future date to ban the advertising of cream cakes, pizzas and curries, or anything that happens to be bad for us? This is the start of a very slippery slope, and one that I am not prepared to go down.

The Bill would do enormous damage to sports clubs. It is estimated that alcohol companies spent between Â£150 million and Â£200 million a year sponsoring sport alone, including many amateur sports teams. Without that sponsorship it would be difficult for those clubs to continue. We have the rather ludicrous suggestion that we should for health reasons attempt to try to stop the advertising of alcohol, the only consequence of which would be to stop lots of people being able to take part in sporting activities, which is presumably something the health lobby wants to encourage. The Minister for Sport and the Olympics
reiterated that point when he stated:

"I know both from my own experience of growing up playing sport in Kent and my work as a constituency MP that the sponsorship offered by alcohol companies to community sports clubs brings a considerable number of benefits, both financially and in kind. This allows sports clubs to reach out to more people or improve their offer in a way that would not otherwise be possible."

I object to the Bill in principle, but even the people who accept it in principle must recognise that it is completely unnecessary. It is a solution looking for a problem. Alcohol already cannot be sold to anyone under the age of 18, so if my hon. Friend is concerned about young people drinking alcohol, surely the solution to the problem is to stop anyone selling it to them. That law already exists.

The UK already has a comprehensive framework of regulation that makes the Bill completely unnecessary. The Advertising Standards Authority has an established regulatory system, the Portman Group provides its own code of practice and Ofcom regulates TV programme sponsorship. The current alcohol advertising rules were tightened in October 2005, in response to the alcohol harm reduction strategy, and they were reviewed again in 2008, taking into account the latest evidence commissioned by the Department of Health, and were subject to a full public consultation in 2009. The rules already state that adverts must not target under-18s; be shown around programmes that especially appeal to under-18s; link alcohol with seduction, sex or social success; link alcohol with irresponsible, anti-social, tough or daring behaviour; show alcohol being served irresponsibly; show people drinking and behaving in an adolescent or juvenile way or reflecting the culture of people under 18-years-old; or be shown in publications aimed at under-18s or where more than 25% of the readership is under 18.

Additionally, alcohol adverts already cannot be shown around programmes popular with young people, such as "The Simpsons" and "Ugly Betty", even if the programmes appear after 9 pm. The Portman Group also introduced a code in 1996 that regulates all drinks marketed in the UK through its code of practice on the naming, packaging and promotion of alcoholic drinks. Its code is so rigorous and highly regarded that the better regulation taskforce described it as a good example of how effective self-regulation can be, and the International Harm Reduction Association includes the code within its leading 50 global alcohol harm reduction initiatives.

Furthermore, the aim of the Bill is not evidence-based. The argument is that it will reduce drinking levels among younger people, but that has not been proven by any research evidence. If any such impact did exist, it would be outweighed by other factors, such as the family environment. In fact, a study, "The Impact of Alcohol Marketing on Youth Drinking Behaviour", found that

"no association was found between uptake of drinking and baseline awareness of alcohol marketing or number of brands recalled at baseline...no association was found between uptake of monthly drinking at follow-up and baseline awareness of alcohol marketing."

Professor Hastings actually completed a longitudinal study to try to measure the impact of alcohol marketing on 13-year-olds in the west of Scotland. He found no association between awareness of alcohol marketing at age 13 and either the onset of drinking or the volume of alcohol consumed two years later. Surprisingly, that part of the study received very little publicity.
The lack of evidence is also apparent if we look at international comparisons. Norway has strictly no advertising for alcoholic beverages, yet consumption has been steadily increasing. In Italy, where alcohol advertising is permitted, consumption is decreasing. France is also an interesting case, as it is the example on which my hon. Friend bases her Bill. The equivalent Loi Evin Bill was introduced in France in 1991, but it has not had the intended consequences that she would have hoped for. Statistics from the World Health Organisation show that French alcohol consumption decreased from 18.46 litres per capita in 1981 to 14.88 litres in 1991. Since the Loi Evin was enacted, consumption has levelled off, dropping to only 13.24 litres, highlighting the fact that the legislation has had little, if any, impact.

The Bill smacks of the nanny state and would set a dangerous precedent for future legislation. It would damage an already fragile amateur sporting club base without any evidence-based proof that such a change in the law would reduce youth alcohol consumption. There are less burdensome means by which we can reduce underage drinking, such as enforcing existing laws on the sale of alcohol to under-18s and to do what the Government should be doing, which is highlighting the health implications of drinking alcohol and allowing people to make up their own minds. In a free country, that is what we should believe in. This is a further extension of the nanny state to try to appease health zealots and fanatics who will never be appeased.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23) and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Dr Sarah Wollaston, Mr Kevin Barron, Tracey Crouch, John Pugh, Stephen Gilbert, Paul Flynn, Mr David Amess, Chris Bryant, Kelvin Hopkins, Mike Wood, Anne Marie Morris and John McDonnell present the Bill.

Dr Sarah Wollaston accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 176).

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