Would my hon. Friend add to his excellent list the role for technology in helping to improve the lives of older people? In my area, Devon and Cornwall, more than 250 older people go missing every year, many of them with dementia. Many technological advances can be used to give older people much greater confidence to go out, knowing they can be found quickly and easily, and to reduce distress. Also, many technological improvements can keep older people in touch, give them a link with younger people and improve their IT skills.

David Amess (Southend West, Conservative)

I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend, who is right to mention dementia. Fortunately, in our area, through the generosity of a local resident, Ivan Heath, we will shortly be opening Peaceful Place to care for people with dementia. My goodness that is an issue we must increasingly face up to, given our ageing population. She is also right to talk about the assistance that improved technology can provide.

The Dilnot commission, agreed to in the coalition agreement, has now reported, with some controversy. I have been involved in this issue for some time, and in 2000 I was fortunate to come fourth in the ballot for private Members' Bills, so I am associated with the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, which sought to eliminate fuel poverty, and the more that colleagues can do to advertise the help available to older people, the better. There is much they can claim.

In conclusion, there is a good precedent for creating a Minister for older people within the current Government. We have a Minister for nearly every walk of life— for children, for disabled people, for women and equalities— so why can we not have one for older people? Such a position might even warrant a promotion. My right hon. Friend Mrs May who does a splendid job as Home Secretary is concurrently the Minister for Women and Equalities, managing both roles equally well. A dual role could easily be managed by one of my right hon. or hon. Friends. It is important to note this has been done internationally— in Ireland, Canada and New Zealand, for example. Ministers for older people have been appointed in those countries.

We should do everything we possibly can to ensure that people in old age are treated with as much respect and dignity as possible. They have worked all their lives, experienced a huge number of scenarios and situations and contributed to this country in countless ways. If it were not for the sacrifices of older people in the first

and second world wars, we would not have our Parliament today. We have a duty to support them. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North again, as this debate represents a significant step in the right direction. I fully expect a Minister to announce from the Dispatch Box at the end of the debate that the Government will indeed appoint a Minister for Older People.

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