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DRAFT

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Tuesday 3 September 2019

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 3 September 2019

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon and welcome back. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Mr David Fyock, who is the chief executive officer of Mission Aviation Fellowship International.

Mr David Fyock (Mission Aviation Fellowship International): Presiding Officer, elected members of the Scottish Parliament, it is an absolute honour to be with you as you begin your fall term.

Mission Aviation Fellowship, or MAF, is a Christian organisation, whose vision is to reach isolated people in developing countries, to see their lives transformed, physically and spiritually, in Christ's name.

From our inception, almost 75 years ago, we have had close connection with the Scottish people. Our first aircraft for Africa was commissioned at Charlotte chapel, here in Edinburgh. In 2003, Scottish friends funded an airplane for use in Africa. We affectionately call it "Scotty", and it currently serves the people of Liberia, bringing help, hope and healing to lives that have been shattered by Ebola and civil war. Six families with Scottish roots work with us, addressing needs in Africa and in the Pacific. We are honoured to have the head of MAF Scotland serve on the humanitarian emergency fund panel, as part of our commitment to our relationship with Scotland.

We live in a complex world, with immense pressures and challenges. As leaders, we have the incredible privilege and task of influencing people for good. We have a high calling to resolve problems and make this world a better place.

Knowing the best direction to go is often difficult as we face competing values and priorities. What compass can we use to set a course to help us and those we lead to arrive at the right destination? The Bible states three requirements, in Micah, chapter 6, verse 8. First, we must act justly. We are expected to understand how justice works and ensure equal treatment of all people. We cannot be blind. Rather, we should use knowledge to build societies where justice reigns. This establishes peace and prosperity.

Secondly, we must love to show mercy. Having compassion for our fellow man reflects an understanding that we ourselves are needy. Compassion is fuelled by a focus on others. It keeps our hearts from becoming hard and bitter and helps us to find words and do works that build up. This brings joy and contentment.

Thirdly, we must have humility. Humility comes through acknowledgement that we are subjects of a higher authority. It addresses the need of the soul, establishing health and enabling healing. As a Christian, I place myself under the authority of God almighty.

As you begin a new term of Parliament, I wish you God's wisdom and grace. May you seek justice, show mercy and lead Scotland with humility. *[Applause.]*

Business Motion

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-18627, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I invite Graeme Dey to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 3 September 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Oaths/Affirmations

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister Statement: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2019-20

followed by Ministerial Statement: Ferguson Marine

followed by Ministerial Statement: Repatriation of Convergence Funds owed to Scottish Farming

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 September 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform; Rural Economy

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2019-20

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 September 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

followed by Ministerial Statement: Tackling Drug Related Deaths

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Avoiding a No Deal Exit from the EU

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 10 September 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 11 September 2019

1.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.15 pm Members' Business

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and the Law Officers; Government Business and Constitutional Relations

followed by Scottish Government Debate

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 12 September 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

followed by Justice Committee Debate: Post-legislative scrutiny report on the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 17 September 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 18 September 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills;
 Health and Sport

followed by Scottish Government Debate
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 September 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Communities and Local Government
followed by Economy, Energy and Fair Work
 Committee debate: Bill proposal on pre-
 release access to statistics
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 2 September 2019, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Affirmations

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is the making of the affirmation by our new members. First, I invite Sarah Boyack to make the affirmation.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I, Sarah Boyack, do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors, according to law. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Next, I invite Beatrice Wishart to make the affirmation.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I, Beatrice Wishart, do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors, according to law. [*Applause.*]

Topical Question Time

14:07

Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Opening)

1. **Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government by what date the Royal hospital for children and young people in Edinburgh will open. (S5T-01752)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): On 18 July, I informed Parliament that, on 4 July, I had instructed the planned move to be halted in the interests of patient safety. I also said that I had commissioned NHS National Services Scotland to undertake a detailed assessment of all the building systems in the new hospital that could impact safe operation for patients and staff. I said that that would determine the timeframe for migration of services to the new hospital and that a full report was anticipated in September.

That timetable remains on track and publication is expected on 11 September, following which I intend to make a statement to the chamber outlining our planned next steps.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that reply.

The opening of this flagship hospital was cancelled 100 hours before patients were due to arrive, and we still do not know when it will open. Somebody in the food chain signed off the hospital in February, which seemingly absolved Multiplex of any contractual responsibilities. Who signed it off? Did the Government and NHS Lothian agree with their findings and their decision at the time?

Jeane Freeman: As Mr Cole-Hamilton undoubtedly knows, on 2 July, NHS Lothian alerted the Scottish Government to the issue with the ventilation system in the critical care unit on the new site. That is why, in addition to halting the move, I commissioned NSS to undertake all the other compliance checks that I mentioned. Because we had been informed so late of the problem with the critical care unit, I wanted to be assured that every other aspect of the site was compliant with requirements and guidance.

As I have said, at the same time, I commissioned KPMG to investigate the timeline for the whole design and build of the hospital in order to identify why we had got to that late stage before the critical care problem was identified. Both those reports will be published on 11 September and at that point, having had sight of those reports—and with members in the chamber having had sight of those reports and my

statement—we will be able to undertake more detailed responses to those questions.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The unopened hospital is costing the public purse £1.4 million every single month. Children are being treated in a hospital that is well past its sell-by date and we are still not entirely sure what went wrong. Serious questions are once again being asked about this Government's ability to deliver major capital projects, so will the health secretary today instruct a full public inquiry into this fiasco?

Jeane Freeman: My short answer to that is no, I will not, at this point. As I said, I have commissioned two reports; they are on track to be published next week, as Mr Cole-Hamilton well knows, because I believe that next week's business is well known. I will make a statement to Parliament then. At that time, all the information that is available to me will be available to members in the chamber. We will then be able to answer some of those detailed questions, including giving a clear timeline of when we expect the move to the new site to be made safely for the patients, staff and the families involved.

In all of this, my driving interest is patient safety and I am sure that that is the interest of everyone across the chamber.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I ask members to keep their supplementaries concise throughout the afternoon.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): Patient safety, particularly the safety of children, is a priority for us all. When I have advocated for the children's ward at St John's hospital, senior managers at board level have always insisted that patient safety is their priority. Given the intervention from the cabinet secretary to postpone the move so that the new hospital is as safe as it possibly can be, can she advise us whether managers at the most senior levels of NHS Lothian have taken responsibility for these issues, as there is no place for inconsistency in relation to the safety of children receiving national health service services?

Jeane Freeman: I certainly agree with the member that there is no place for inconsistency—or slackness or negligence—in relation to patient safety. NHS Lothian managers at all levels are clear about my expectations. When we have the KPMG report about the decision-making chain all the way through since the hospital was first designed and the NSS report on compliance at other levels and various sign-off decisions that were made, we will have a better understanding of how we got to this very late stage before it was clear that the hospital was not safe for in-patient services and critical care to be moved to because it did not meet the standards required, which

meant that I had to take the decision that I took. At that point, I am sure that members will want to look further at these matters.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The impact on NHS Lothian of this further delay to the opening of the sick kids hospital raises serious questions about the financial sustainability of the board, which is already projecting a financial shortfall of £29.5 million for this financial year. Will the cabinet secretary therefore confirm whether Scottish National Party ministers will help to meet the future costs around the sick kids hospital project?

Jeane Freeman: I have been clear from the outset that cost will not hold us back in terms of ensuring that the new hospital is fit for purpose and is safe for patients and staff. At this point, it is not absolutely clear what the additional costs might be, as work continues to identify exactly what critical care design, procurement and installation work is necessary. Once that information is known, members will have that information.

I have been clear all along that I will be completely transparent about the information that I have and the rationale that I use to take decisions and members will know about all that. At that point, we will understand what additional costs are required. Of course, if the Government assists with those costs, members need to be clear that the money will come from within the NHS health portfolio, so other aspects of healthcare across Scotland may need to be paused, delayed or moved on in order to meet any additional costs that have to be met in this regard.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Members have mentioned the importance of patient safety and the need to be consistent. What has been done to protect the neuroscience patients at the existing site, who include people with brain cancer, multiple sclerosis and motor neurone disease, and who have been assessed as being at high risk due to the delay, following fears over water safety in the current building?

Jeane Freeman: NSS is undertaking a specific risk assessment of the new site to determine whether it is possible to move that unit from the Western general to the new site at the earliest opportunity. That risk assessment is balanced against some of the difficulties for the unit in the existing site, which the member rightly mentioned. The overall risk assessment will balance the two together, and I will then make a decision about what is best for that unit at the Western general.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Neil Findlay and Daniel Johnson, but I will not be able to call them. I hope that they will have an opportunity to ask a question when we have a statement on the issue next week.

Woodmill High School (Support for Pupils)

2. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to Fife Council to deal with the impact on pupils of the fire at Woodmill high school. (S5T-01751)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I would first like to record the Government's appreciation for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and for the exceptional contribution of its personnel in trying to save the school infrastructure during the fire on 25 August.

The Scottish Government has been in regular contact with Fife Council since the fire at Woodmill high school to assist recovery and to minimise disruption to the pupils' learning. I personally reiterated that support to the headteacher and the director of children's services when we spoke last week. At my request, the Scottish Futures Trust is providing on-going support and advice to the council regarding options to accelerate pupils' return to a serviceable building as soon as practicable.

I pay tribute to the headteacher and staff of Woodmill high school for their efforts in ensuring that young people have had access to learning since the fire and for ensuring that, during this week, all secondary 1 to 6 pupils will return to full-time education, with additional support needs pupils returning to full-time education on Monday.

I am pleased to confirm that the Scottish Government, in partnership with Fife Council, will include the construction of a new Woodmill high school in the first phase of the learning estate investment programme. Detailed discussions will take place with Fife Council and the local community on the approach that is to be taken to implement that commitment.

Alex Rowley: I, too, pay tribute to the firefighters as well as to the police and those in the local community who had to deal with the situation. I also pay tribute to Fife Council, which has put in place short-term measures. However, those are only for the short term. I appreciate what the cabinet secretary says about the replacement of Woodmill high school but, even with the best will in the world, it may take three or four years for that to happen. The challenge is what happens in the medium term. Even if part of the existing building can be rescued and refurbished, that will not be enough, so a programme will need to be put in place. The worry is about what happens in the medium term.

John Swinney: I completely understand the issues that Mr Rowley fairly raises. In the short term, the priority has been to restore full-time education to young people. I am grateful to Fife

Council for the way in which that has been handled and for the co-operation of Fife College, which is accommodating some of the S5 pupils; St Columba's high school, which is accommodating the S6 pupils; and Queen Anne high school, Beath high school, Inverkeithing high school and the Vine conference centre, which will provide accommodation for most of the remainder of the school, with the ASN pupils going to Blairhall primary school.

Obviously, this is a disruptive period, but the short-term priority has been to restore full-time education for all the young people. Mr Rowley is correct that we have to move to a medium-term solution, because schools cannot be built in a day. With the support of the Scottish Futures Trust, we are in active discussions to put arrangements in place to meet the young people's needs.

At this stage, it is unlikely that much of the school infrastructure can be utilised, although that is yet to be finalised. That is the subject of the detailed work that is under way. As Mr Rowley will know, site clearance work, initiated by Fife Council, is under way at a very fast pace. I assure the member that the Government will engage closely with Fife Council to support the medium-term arrangements, which I recognise to be a significant priority for families, pupils and staff.

Alex Rowley: I welcome the response. As well as praising the teachers in Woodmill high school for dealing with what they have had to put up with, we should praise all the other teachers and schools in the area that are working hard to accommodate the children. That is for the medium term. In the longer term, the cabinet secretary said that the replacement of Woodmill high school would become the priority. Is he still looking at a joint campus with St Columba's high school, and will discussions on that take place, because grounds are now available at Woodmill high school to build such a campus?

John Swinney: When I spoke to Mr McIntosh, the headteacher at Woodmill high school, last week, one of the significant issues that he addressed was how the Woodmill support and ethos could be maintained when pupils are dispersed across six or seven sites. He was very keen to make sure that pastoral support for pupils is available at all those locations and that the correct arrangement have been put in place to support that.

On the longer-term questions, as Parliament knows, the Government has been engaged in discussions with Fife College and Fife Council about the creation of a new campus that would draw together Fife College, St Columba's high school and Woodmill high school. Those discussions are very active. Indeed, shortly before the fire at Woodmill high school, I had an update

conversation with both Fife College and Fife Council. I am keen to progress those proposals, because they are of significant benefit to the local community. As I said in my original answer, they will be the subject of detailed discussion with Fife Council because, obviously, the circumstances have changed as a consequence of a fire that none of us anticipated we would be wrestling with.

We will engage in those discussions with Fife Council and I hope that the Government commitment under the learning estate investment programme to the rebuild of Woodmill high school will be of significant reassurance to the local community. I will visit the site tomorrow to reinforce those points.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Annabelle Ewing and Mark Ruskell, as there is not enough time for further supplementaries.

Scottish Prison Service (Fatal Accident Inquiry Determination)

3. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action the Scottish Prison Service has taken in response to the determination of the fatal accident inquiry into the death of Allan Marshall at HMP Edinburgh. (S5T-01746)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): First and foremost, I express my condolences to Allan Marshall's family. Any death in our care is a tragedy. I am determined that our justice system continues to learn and improve so that we can avoid such tragedies from happening again in the future.

In his determination, Sheriff Liddle makes 13 recommendations about steps that he considers might realistically prevent deaths in similar circumstances in the future. The SPS is rightly reflecting on the recommendations in detail and, in line with provisions in the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc (Scotland) Act 2016, will provide a full response to all the recommendations within eight weeks.

The SPS has also confirmed that a range of actions were taken immediately following the incident, including additional training for staff.

The SPS has now established a working group to address the sheriff's specific recommendations, in particular with reference to control and restraint and the understanding of medical conditions that may be triggered or indeed exacerbated by the use of restraint. The SPS will seek additional external expert advice as part of the review.

I have been clear that lessons must be learned and to ensure independent oversight, I have written to Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons asking her formally to provide external assurance

to the SPS's actions following the FAI recommendations, in conjunction with relevant independent experts, as required.

The SPS met members of Mr Marshall's family yesterday and I will also meet them to discuss their concerns and the actions being taken in response to this very tragic incident.

Rona Mackay: I want to express my condolences to Allan Marshall's family, and I sincerely hope that lessons will be learned from this tragic case. One of Sheriff Liddle's recommendations refers to a review of control and restraint. Will the cabinet secretary outline what work will be carried out by the SPS to ensure that all staff are fully trained in that respect?

Humza Yousaf: I will be brief, because I think that I made reference to that in my previous answer. Immediately after the incident, some work was undertaken in relation to the training involving control and restraint, but the short-life working group will look at the processes around control and restraint. The SPS has recognised that external expert advice should be fed into that but, to give further reassurance, I have also asked HM inspectorate of prisons for Scotland to give independent external oversight to that process. That will clearly be an issue of interest for many—first and foremost, for Mr Marshall's family, but more widely, no doubt, for the Parliament. I will endeavour to keep the Parliament up to date in the most appropriate way possible.

Rona Mackay: Will the cabinet secretary ensure that the Justice Committee is updated on any further developments?

Humza Yousaf: Yes. I will make sure that that is done through the committee, and if members who are not on the Justice Committee have an interest, I will endeavour to keep them updated also.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Rona Mackay rightly identified that the training and qualifications of prison officers are clearly of great import. The Scottish National Party's 2017 programme for government promised a prison officer professionalisation programme. Has that been delivered?

Humza Yousaf: The reason why that professionalisation programme has not come to fruition is that the members rejected it in a ballot. I do not think that Liam Kerr would expect us to override the members' concerns when that was put to ballot. There is still an outstanding question about professionalisation. The SPS is in continued conversation with the Prison Officers Association about professionalisation but, of course, we have to listen to the members and take them, prison officers and others with us.

Notwithstanding that, the work that the short-life working group is doing will, we hope, bring a level of confidence to particular training on control and restraint that will give the public the confidence that they need.

The Presiding Officer: Again, I recognise the level of political interest in the subject. I apologise to James Kelly, John Finnie and Liam McArthur, as there is simply not enough time this afternoon for everything that we want to raise. That concludes topical questions.

Programme for Government 2019-20

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2019-20. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

14:27

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I begin by welcoming Sarah Boyack back to Parliament and welcoming Beatrice Wishart to Parliament. I wish them both well.

The centrepiece of the programme for government is our work to tackle the climate emergency. However, I must begin by addressing the political and constitutional emergency that is engulfing the United Kingdom. Today in the House of Commons, members of Parliament from across the political divide will seek to block the possibility of a no-deal Brexit. Given the anti-democratic move last week by Boris Johnson to shut down Parliament, it is absolutely vital that that effort succeeds.

Scottish National Party MPs will do everything possible to stop the UK crashing out of the European Union without a deal. Scotland did not vote for any form of Brexit, and having a catastrophic no-deal Brexit imposed upon us is completely and utterly unacceptable. Of course, as long as that outcome remains a risk, the Scottish Government will do all that we can to mitigate the impact on families, communities and businesses across our country. We will also work to minimise the impact on the programme for government, but clearly, if a no-deal Brexit happens, it will not be possible to remove that impact entirely.

Most important of all, we intend to offer the people of Scotland the choice of a better and more positive future as an independent nation. The Referendums (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced before the recess, is about to resume its parliamentary progress. I can confirm today that, during the passage of the bill, we will seek agreement to the transfer of power that will put the referendum beyond legal challenge. We have a clear democratic mandate to offer the choice of independence within this term of Parliament, and we intend to do so.

Of course, it now seems inevitable that there will be an early UK general election, so let me be crystal clear today: the SNP will put Scotland's

opposition to Brexit and our right to choose independence at the very heart of that contest.

It is easy to feel—with good reason—that the past 12 months have been dominated by Brexit, but in Scotland, we have made important progress in creating a better and a fairer country. We have established a new social security agency, which is now providing assistance to more than 90,000 people across our country. We have made progress in closing the attainment gap in our schools and widening access to our universities. We have continued to recruit childcare workers and build or refurbish nurseries to prepare for our unprecedented expansion of early years education and childcare. World-leading domestic abuse legislation has come into force and, according to the most recent figures, our exports have grown more rapidly than those of the rest of the UK, while our unemployment rate is lower.

This year's programme for government builds on that record. The year ahead will consolidate Scotland's position as a leader in the battle against climate change. It will see landmark policies, which have been long in the planning, come to fruition. For example, the new national investment bank will be established, and our massive expansion of free universal early years education and childcare will be delivered. We will continue with record investment in, and reform of, health and social care, and we will take game-changing action to tackle child poverty.

This programme for government will reinforce Scotland's place as a dynamic, open and innovative economy, and it will help us to build a fairer society—one that is defined by our concern for the rights, dignity and wellbeing of every individual. In short, while the Westminster Government shuts down, the Scottish Government is stepping up.

Earlier this year, I acknowledged that Scotland—like the rest of the world—faces a climate emergency. Shortly after, I confirmed that the Scottish Government would accept the recommendations of the UK Committee on Climate Change. We have now committed to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 at the latest, which is earlier than any other UK nation. Of course, Parliament will have the opportunity to pass that legislation in the autumn.

This year's programme for government is an important part of our response to the climate emergency. It lays the foundations for a new Scottish green deal, with measures to reduce emissions, support sustainable and inclusive growth, promote wellbeing and create a fairer society.

However, although the measures that I am setting out today are significant, they should not

be viewed as the sum total of our efforts. In the next 12 months, we will receive the recommendations of the infrastructure commission, publish a finalised transport strategy, complete our capital spending review, renew the national planning framework and publish an updated climate change plan. All that work is vital in ensuring that Scotland becomes a net zero emissions nation.

Last year, I set out a new infrastructure mission for Scotland to increase annual infrastructure investment by 1 per cent of gross domestic product by 2025. Tackling climate change will be central to the investment decisions that we make. One area in which we must act is transport, which is currently responsible for more than a third of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions.

I therefore announce the following actions: we will continue to support the growth in electric and ultra-low-emission car use as part of our aim to phase out new petrol and diesel cars by 2032. Scotland already has one of the most comprehensive charging networks anywhere in Europe. Last week, I announced a pioneering new partnership among the Scottish Government, Scottish Power and SSE to deliver more charging points and the electricity infrastructure to support them.

Over the next year, we will help more businesses and consumers to buy ultra-low-emission vehicles, including second-hand ones, with a further £17 million of low-carbon transport loans.

On aviation, I announce a bold aim to make the Highlands and Islands the world's first zero-emissions aviation region, with flights and airport operations fully decarbonised. I can advise Parliament that we will trial low or zero-emissions flights during 2021—we are quite literally piloting new technology here in Scotland. We intend to decarbonise all flights between airports in Scotland by 2040.

We will also continue to electrify Scotland's railways. Around three quarters of passenger journeys in Scotland already use electrified lines. That proportion will continue to grow. Where electrification is not practical or desirable, we will invest in battery-powered trains and explore the potential of hydrogen-powered trains. Detailed timescales for that work will be set out in the spring. However, I can confirm our overall aim. Scotland's rail services will be decarbonised by 2035, five years ahead of the UK ambition.

Of course, the vast majority of public transport journeys in Scotland are by bus. In the past eight years, the Scottish Government has supported the purchase of almost 500 low-emission buses, but we need to do much more. We will work with the

new Scottish national investment bank, the bus sector and potential investors to seek new forms of financing. By doing so, we aim to significantly increase the use of low-emission buses across Scotland.

However, if we want to encourage more people to travel by bus, we must also make it a quicker and more reliable option. I can therefore announce today a major—indeed, transformational—capital investment programme. During the next few years, we will work with councils on the design and delivery of schemes to reduce congestion through new priority routes for buses in and around our towns and cities. I can confirm that we will back that with new investment of more than £0.5 billion pounds.

Last, but by no means least on transport, we will continue to support active travel. Last year, we doubled our annual investment in cycling and walking from £40 million to £80 million. I can confirm today that that increased level of investment will be maintained. It is enabling 11 large-scale projects, the first of which, Glasgow's south city way, will be completed next year.

Lowering emissions from transport, especially in our cities, is essential for the environment, and for our health and wellbeing. The next phase of Glasgow's low-emission zone will start next year, and we expect low-emission zones to be in place in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee. However, I also confirm today that we will consult on the further steps that we need to take now to achieve the transition to zero-emissions city centres by 2030.

As well as in transport, we will intensify our actions to reduce emissions from heating and housing, and to tackle fuel poverty. We are already investing £500 million in energy efficiency measures during the current parliamentary session. In December, we will update our energy efficiency route map, which is our energy retrofit scheme. We intend to accelerate progress towards improved energy performance certificate ratings in Scotland's homes. We will enhance building standards to help us deliver zero and low-carbon homes and buildings. In particular, I can announce today that from 2024—a year earlier than planned for the rest of the UK—we will require all new-build homes to be heated from renewable or low-carbon sources, rather than fossil-fuel boilers.

Those steps will be accompanied by additional support from the Scottish low carbon heat fund, which will provide a minimum of £30 million for renewable heat projects, including heat pumps. We will also introduce a heat networks bill to regulate district and communal heating networks in a way that supports their growth.

All businesses, third sector organisations and individuals have a role to play in tackling climate change, but the public sector has a special responsibility to lead by example. That is why we will mobilise our £11 billion procurement budget to help to meet our climate change targets. That will include a consultation on new legislation to legally require public bodies to set out how they will use procurement budgets to meet their climate change and circular economy obligations.

I can also announce that publicly owned Scottish Water—the biggest purchaser of electricity in Scotland—will commit to becoming a net zero company by 2040. By 2030, it will aim to produce or host three times more renewable energy than it consumes.

Many of the steps to reduce emissions from transport and heating that I have outlined so far depend on a decarbonised electricity supply, so we will continue to support renewable energy. Next year we will publish an action plan for the development of hydrogen. A new offshore wind policy statement will set out our plans for that sector, including how we secure more economic and supply chain benefit from our offshore wind resources.

I know—and I understand why—many climate change campaigners and others argue that part of our response to the climate emergency should be the immediate withdrawal of support for oil and gas. However, aside from offshore licensing and regulation being reserved matters, the hard fact is that early closure of domestic production, before we are able to meet all demand from zero-carbon sources, would be likely to increase emissions, because a significant proportion of the oil that would then require to be imported has a higher carbon intensity than UK production.

However, the oil and gas sector does have a bigger role to play. I can confirm that our support for oil and gas will now be conditional on the sector's actions to help to ensure a sustainable energy transition. As part of that, we will work with the Oil & Gas Technology Centre to help to develop renewable technologies that can be integrated with our existing oil and gas infrastructure. One of those technologies is carbon capture, utilisation and storage. Scotland has the potential to store huge quantities of carbon dioxide under the North Sea. We will work with the Scottish national investment bank to explore how we can help industry to develop that technology, and we will continue to press the UK Government to develop the UK-wide frameworks needed to make it a success. Scotland has the opportunity to become a world leader in that essential industry of the future and we must grasp that opportunity.

We will also continue our efforts to reduce waste, and to reuse and recycle materials more

effectively. To encourage that further, we will introduce a circular economy bill in the coming year. Among other things, it will enable charges to be applied for items such as single-use coffee cups.

Finally, we will ensure that our land use—including our agriculture, our forestry and our peatland restoration—is consistent with progress towards a net zero economy. We will support the development of regional land use partnerships between now and 2021, we will develop an agriculture transformation programme, and we will invest an additional £5 million to increase our tree planting target from 10,000 to 12,000 hectares next year. Further detail of all that will be set out in the updated climate change plan.

Responding to climate change is not simply a moral obligation. It is also an economic and social opportunity. It provides us with an incentive to make our air cleaner, our lifestyles healthier, and our cities and landscapes even more beautiful. We will act to ensure that Scotland benefits economically from being one of the first countries in the world to move to a net zero future. The Scottish national investment bank, which will become operational next year, will invest at least £2 billion over 10 years, providing patient finance for ambitious companies and projects that can help us to achieve key national missions. I confirm that the bank's primary mission will be to secure the transition to a net zero economy.

We will take other steps, too. Under the current growth accelerator model—which is helping to deliver the new St James centre here in Edinburgh, for example—local authorities borrow to fund the public infrastructure that is needed to encourage private investment in key projects. I can announce that over the next few months, we will work with councils to establish a new green growth accelerator. That will enable local authorities to invest in, and encourage greater private investment in, projects that reduce emissions and boost growth—in effect, a form of green city region deal. The Scottish Government will also develop and bring to market a green investment portfolio of projects worth at least £3 billion, covering areas such as heat, waste, power generation and property. We are, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the best countries in the world in which to invest in low carbon or net zero projects. By promoting the green investment portfolio, we will ensure that that fact is known to investors around the world.

We are determined to ensure that the transition to net zero happens in a way that is consistent with our wider vision for a fairer, wealthier Scotland. The just transition commission will produce an interim report early next year on how the decarbonisation of our economy can reduce

inequality and promote decent, fair, high-value work.

The challenge of guaranteeing good jobs is why I am also announcing that we will develop and publish a climate emergency skills action plan. The plan will build on the future skills action plan that is being published later today. To guarantee good jobs, we must ensure that people have the skills needed for new techniques in construction, energy efficiency, manufacturing and transport. Skills training—not simply for our young people but for people at all stages of their working life—is an essential part of ensuring that people are not left behind by technological change, as they too often have been in the past.

All those actions demonstrate how moving to a net zero economy is compatible with our ambitions to boost Scotland's productivity, increase our sustainable growth rate and be the country that designs, develops and manufactures the key innovations of the future. To further support those ambitions, work will start this year on the £48 million national manufacturing institute for Scotland. The Lightweight Manufacturing Centre is already open and helping companies to secure the support and services that they need.

We will also maintain our increased funding for research and development, with the aim of doubling business investment in R and D by 2025, and we will continue to support key sectors of our economy. The programme for Government details our actions to support sectors such as food and drink, life sciences and industrial biotechnology, digital and data, and the creative industries.

In the coming months, we will launch a new tourism strategy, followed by an action plan in the new year. We are determined to support this vital sector at a time when its extraordinary recent success is presenting challenges as well as considerable opportunities. In recent years, a great boost for our tourism sector has been the reputation that Scotland has earned as a first-class host of major events. Later this month, Gleneagles will host the Solheim cup, and next year, Glasgow will host four matches for the Euro 2020 football tournament. The UEFA European championships bill will therefore form part of this year's legislative programme. It will help to ensure the successful delivery of the games that will be hosted by Glasgow and meet the commitments that are required by the Union of European Football Associations to prohibit ticket touting and protect commercial rights during the event.

This programme recognises the vital importance of ensuring that all parts of Scotland benefit from economic growth. We will continue to support city region deals and regional growth deals. We will also support the rural economy. By the end of the year, we will publish the first ever national islands

plan, and by April next year, we will have established south of Scotland enterprise.

We will also continue to deliver improved digital infrastructure to every part of our country. Our commitment to provide access to superfast broadband for every home and business in Scotland is the most ambitious of any Government in the UK, which is particularly impressive when we consider that it is largely a reserved matter. The £600 million R100 programme will take superfast broadband coverage from its current level of more than 90 per cent to 100 per cent. By the end of this year, we will have awarded the contract to deliver it.

We will work to ensure that Scotland's economy benefits from strong international connections. We will continue to implement our export plan, recruiting new in-market specialists for our enterprise agencies, working with chambers of commerce to deliver more trade missions and encouraging experienced exporters to act as mentors for newer companies. Last year, Scotland's goods exports increased by almost 13 per cent, and we are determined to see that figure grow even further.

I also announce that we will launch a new foreign direct investment plan to attract new investment in key sectors of our economy. The plan will enable us to offer support to start-ups specialising in technology or low-carbon industries anywhere in the world if they choose to relocate to Scotland.

We will also continue to pursue a balanced and progressive approach to taxation. We have already ensured that the majority of people in Scotland pay less income tax than elsewhere in the UK, while those who can afford to pay proportionately more. We have ensured that, across all transactions, we have the most competitive rates in the UK for non-domestic land and buildings transaction tax, helping to make Scotland a more attractive location for potential investors. For residential LBTT, 80 per cent have paid no tax at all or less than they would have done under stamp duty rates. Our relief for first-time buyers has helped almost 8,000 people in the past year.

Full details of our tax plans for the year ahead will be set out as normal as part of the budget bill process. However, I confirm that in the year ahead we will consult on and introduce legislation to give councils the power to apply a transient visitor levy, often called a tourist tax, which will enable local authorities to introduce such a levy if they consider it right in their local circumstances. That is a further example of our commitment to devolve more power to local councils across our country. Our approach to taxation is intended to encourage business investment and economic growth, and to

provide us with the resources that we need to fund world-class public services.

Next August, we will deliver one of the defining commitments of the current parliamentary session: about 80,000 families in Scotland will start to benefit from our expansion of early years education and childcare. All three and four-year-olds, and all two-year-olds from poorer families, will be eligible for 30 hours a week of free early learning and childcare during the school year. That represents a total investment of more than £900 million each year in giving our children the very best start in life, and it will save parents up to £4,500 per child every year.

We will continue our work to close the attainment gap in schools and raise standards for all. We are investing more than £180 million in the attainment fund. To allow schools to plan ahead, I confirm that we will continue the fund until at least March 2022.

We will provide further support for headteachers in the year ahead, and we will start to deliver the recommendations of the independent panel on career pathways for teachers. I also announce that we will make an additional £15 million available this year to improve the experience of children who have additional support needs, and their families.

We will shortly announce the first set of schools to be built through our new £1 billion school investment programme. As the Deputy First Minister confirmed earlier, a priority of that new programme will be to work with Fife Council to rebuild Woodmill high school in Dunfermline as quickly as possible after it was so badly damaged by fire last week.

As well as investing in childcare and schools, we will continue to invest in our colleges and universities. In the next year, we aim to deliver 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts, meeting the commitment that we made in 2016. We will continue to widen access to university, building on the progress that we have seen in recent years. To support that, we will increase our investment in bursary support for eligible students in higher and further education.

The independent care review will report early next year. I have been clear, though, that we should not delay making changes now that will help to level the playing field for care-experienced young people. I am therefore announcing a further package of commitments today as a down payment on the longer-term changes that the review is likely to recommend. For example, I confirm that in the coming year we will remove dental charges for care-experienced people between the ages of 18 and 26; we will ensure access to discretionary housing payments for

care-experienced young people in receipt of a qualifying benefit; we will extend entitlement to early learning and childcare provision to two-year-olds with a care-experienced parent; we will create a statutory presumption in favour of siblings in care being placed together when it is in their best interests; and, from the start of the 2020-21 academic year, we will remove the age cap of 26 for access to the care-experienced student bursary. Children and young people who grow up in the care of the state deserve to be loved and supported to reach their full potential. I am determined that we will live up to that.

Alongside our investment in education and services for young people, the programme for government provides record levels of support for our national health service. Last year, we set out a major package of investment in mental health services. We will continue to deliver better support for new mothers who experience mental health problems, and we will meet our pledge to provide an additional 800 mental health professionals by March 2022 in settings such as hospitals, general practice surgeries and prisons. The first tranche of the 350 counsellors that we committed to last year will work in our secondary schools in this school year, and I confirm that they will all be in place by this time next year.

This year, working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we will implement our plans for a community wellbeing service across Scotland, which will be supported by £17 million of additional funding over the next two years.

That service will focus initially on people who are aged between five and 24. However, I can advise Parliament that we will also begin to consider how it can, in the future, be extended to people of all ages. That is an important investment in the wellbeing and happiness of our young people that will bring short-term and long-term benefits for our society.

We will continue to direct more resources to primary care, increase the number of GPs entering training, invest in general practice nursing, and support recruitment of more link workers, paramedics and pharmacists. By 2021, that additional investment will total £500 million a year. Over the next year, we will invest more than £100 million to implement the waiting times improvement plan. We are also continuing to invest in better facilities for elective procedures, including hip replacements. Construction will start on major new centres for elective treatment in Livingston, Inverness and Aberdeen.

We will ensure that our accident and emergency services, which have been the best performing in the UK for the past four years, continue to be world class. We have already opened major trauma centres in Aberdeen and Dundee; in the

next year, work will progress on new centres in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

In light of the situation with the new Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh, on which the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will provide a full statement next week, I confirm that we will establish a new body to oversee NHS infrastructure developments.

We will work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to increase the effectiveness of health and social care integration, and we will continue to fund the implementation of Frank's law, which ensures that anyone who needs personal care has access to it without charge, regardless of their age.

Alongside those improvements to health and care services, we are taking steps to help people to live healthier lives. Two years ago, I announced an additional £20 million a year to reduce the harm that is caused by drugs in our society. The drug death statistics that were published over the summer reinforced the scale and urgency of that task. The situation that we face is a public health emergency, and our response must recognise that. I therefore announce that there will be additional investment of £10 million in each of the next two years. That extra funding will help the drug deaths task force to support new and existing projects and to test different approaches. It will also help to improve provision of opiate-substitute therapy.

A new inclusive Scotland fund will involve people who have experience of severe multiple disadvantages in developing approaches to improve outcomes and save lives.

At the moment, UK legislation prevents us from introducing the medically supervised overdose-prevention facilities that experts say would make a difference. We will continue to seek the powers that we need to take that action: I call again on the UK Government to accede to that request. We will also consult on wider reforms to drug laws so that the Scottish Parliament is ready to act when we have the power to do so.

We will take action on other public health issues. Active Scotland is promoting healthier lifestyles—for example, by increasing support for community sports hubs in deprived communities. In addition, by autumn next year, we will have made improvements to school meals. We will set maximum limits for consumption of red processed meat, increase the amount of fruit and vegetables that are served, reduce the amount of sugar that is available, and encourage use of fresh local produce.

Those actions are in line with the aspirations of the good food nation bill that will be introduced this year. Scotland's international reputation for quality

food and drink is not always reflected in our diets. The good food nation bill will provide a statutory framework for our efforts to promote healthier and more sustainable local produce.

We are continuing our work to restrict promotion and marketing of food and drink that are high in fat, sugar or salt, and we will introduce a bill on restricting food promotions in next year's legislative programme.

In addition to our investment in education and health, we will support the cultural sector. I confirm that, having consulted and received, I think, 200 responses, we will publish our new culture strategy later this year.

Over the coming year, we will take further steps to tackle poverty in our country. Last year, we invested an estimated £1.4 billion in support for low-income households. That included almost £100 million to protect people from the impact of disgraceful UK welfare cuts.

Scotland is currently the only part of the UK to have statutory targets for reducing child poverty. I confirm that we will, in order to help to meet those targets, introduce legislation for a new Scottish child payment of £10 a week. I am very pleased to announce today that we plan to make the first payments to eligible families with children under the age of six by Christmas next year, which is ahead of the schedule that we set out before the summer recess. All eligible families with children under the age of 16 will receive payments by the end of 2022. That investment will provide more than £500 a year per child for the families who need it most. We estimate that, when it is delivered in full, the new child payment will lift 30,000 children out of poverty. Anti-poverty campaigners have described it as "a game changer", and they are right to do so.

The child payment will, of course, be delivered by Social Security Scotland. In its first year of operation, the agency has supported more than 90,000 people through the best start grant, best start foods and the carer's allowance supplement. I confirm that, later this month, the first funeral support payments will be made to help families on lower incomes who are struggling with funeral costs. Later this autumn, young carers will start to receive £300 a year through the young carer grant.

I can also confirm today that—assuming that we get the co-operation that we need from the UK Government—from spring next year, young people will start to receive the job start payment, which is a new payment to help around 5,000 young people with expenses such as travel costs and new clothing when they return to work after a period of unemployment. In the summer of next

year, we will introduce disability assistance for children and young people.

Those are all further steps towards establishing a social security system that is based on the principles of fairness, dignity and respect—and it could not be in sharper contrast to the one that is operated by Westminster.

That basic commitment to social justice must also underpin our approach to homelessness and housing. We are in the first year of a three-year investment—totalling more than £32 million—in our rapid rehousing and housing first programmes, which will support hundreds of people in the coming year. In addition, this year we will launch a £4.5 million fund for third sector organisations that are involved in tackling homelessness, thereby enabling them to improve and, in some cases, to transform the services that they provide. Over this parliamentary session, we will invest more than £3.3 billion in affordable housing. Indeed, I can announce today that we are firmly on course to meet our target of delivering 50,000 affordable homes, including 35,000 for social rent. I am also delighted to confirm that, in December this year, we will launch a new £150 million national pilot scheme to provide first-time house buyers with up to £25,000 towards their deposits.

This programme for government also includes important measures to protect communities and strengthen human rights. We will support our Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and protect the police budget. Among other things, that support will enable police officers to spend more time in their communities through use of mobile technology.

We will provide further protection to service animals by implementing Finn's law as part of our animal health and welfare bill, which will be introduced as part of this year's programme. We have significantly increased capital spending to modernise our prison estate and, having last year established the victims task force, we will continue to put victims at the heart of the justice system—for example, by investing in facilities for child witnesses to give pre-recorded evidence.

We will introduce a forensic medical services bill to improve services for victims of sexual offences, which is an important part of our on-going work to ensure that those victims receive better support, and that their cases are handled more effectively by the justice and healthcare systems.

We will make other important improvements to criminal and civil law. A new hate crime bill will consolidate and update existing hate crime legislation. Indeed, the vital importance of tackling hate crimes—including those that are prompted by religious and racial hatreds—was underlined by

the unacceptable sectarian disorder that took place on the streets of Govan last Friday night.

We will introduce a redress bill for survivors of in-care abuse, which will set out how financial redress can be paid to survivors of historic child abuse who were in care in Scotland.

The defamation and malicious publications bill will modernise the law in that area by balancing protection of people's reputations with the important principle of free expression. We will also introduce a civil partnerships bill that will enable mixed-sex couples to enter into civil partnerships.

The Government will continue to take steps to strengthen human rights and promote equality. We will hold our next race equality conference early next year; we will implement key recommendations of the national advisory council on women and girls by, for example, establishing a new collaborative to promote gender equality across Scottish public life; and we will continue our work to tackle the gender pay gap.

We will also work to advance Scotland's reputation as one of the most progressive countries in Europe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex equality. As part of that, I confirm that we will consult on the details of draft legislation to bring Scotland's process of gender recognition into line with international best practice.

In addition, although legislation for it does not feature in this year's programme, I reaffirm our commitment that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will be incorporated into Scots law before the end of the parliamentary session.

The national task force for human rights leadership will continue its work to develop a new statutory framework for safeguarding human rights in Scotland.

As I said at the outset, we have to prepare for the possibility of Brexit. We will work with others to try to block a no-deal Brexit and to prevent Scotland from being removed from the EU, but we must plan for all eventualities. This year's legislative programme includes two measures that are directly linked to Brexit. The rural support bill will enable us to modify elements of retained EU law that relate to the common agricultural policy, and will provide us with new powers for collection of agriculture data. Those powers will be needed if Scotland has to leave the EU, because we would seek to simplify and improve CAP legislation.

The UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill will allow the Scottish Government and Parliament to align devolved law with EU law. In particular, it will provide us with the power to keep pace with

changes to regulations and standards that are subsequently made by the EU. Doing that would send a clear signal about Scotland's desire and ability to rejoin the EU.

Alongside those crucial legislative changes, we will continue to plan for the possibility of a no-deal Brexit, with a focus on ensuring continuity of medicine and food supplies, and providing reassurance and support for EU citizens.

As long as no deal remains a risk, we will do everything that we can to ensure that Scotland is as prepared as we can be. However, unlike the UK Government, we will be honest about the inability to prevent all the harm that a catastrophic no-deal Brexit would inflict.

It is worth making the point that those measures, although vital, are about mitigation and making UK Government decisions less damaging than they might otherwise be. Mitigating bad Westminster decisions should not be what this Parliament is all about—we should be focussing all our energies on the positive decisions that will secure the best future for our country. The opportunity to choose that better and more hopeful future as an independent country is one that Scotland deserves, and this Government is determined to offer it.

The programme sets out how the Government will get on with the job of building a better country. It puts people's health, prosperity and wellbeing at its heart. By this time next year, 80,000 families will be benefiting from more than 1,000 hours of free childcare a year; we will have delivered 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts; we will be even further on the way to delivering 50,000 affordable homes; we will have introduced a further four social security payments; we will have established the Scottish national investment bank; and we will have confirmed our global leadership in the fight against climate change.

The programme sets out actions for the next 12 months that will make a difference for years to come. It details measures that can help to make our country the best in the world in which to grow up, learn, work and live. It meets the challenges of the future, while staying true to our enduring values. I commend it to Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: We have just under an hour for the First Minister to take questions.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I, too, welcome back MSPs to the chamber after an eventful summer for us all. I welcome back Sarah Boyack. I also welcome Beatrice Wishart, who is sitting next to the architect of her victory, Willie Rennie Mackintosh. [*Laughter.*]

Let us look at the SNP's record this summer: half a million pounds wasted settling a bungled

case with the First Minister's predecessor; tens of millions of pounds at risk thanks to a bungled and delayed ferry contract on the Clyde; and, worst of all, families in this city asking why a state-of-the-art children's hospital is still not open years after it was supposed to be.

In every programme for government, there are measures that can be supported. We will examine the detail rigorously and, where such measures exist, we will support them. However, the First Minister's statement was a classic of the genre. Every September, we hear the same long list of self-congratulatory and grandiose promises. Remember the education bill that was going to transform schools? Long since binned. Remember the big plan to devolve a new raft of benefits to this Parliament? Delayed. Remember the state-owned energy company? Does anyone remember Sturgeon energy?

In total, 30 promises in previous programmes for government under this First Minister have been broken or are delayed. When that is her broken record, why should anyone believe that this latest wish list will ever be delivered?

The First Minister: The one thing that I took out of all of that, if anyone was listening carefully, was that the Tories would not have saved shipbuilding jobs on the Clyde. That is no great surprise, is it? The Tories have never been trustworthy on shipbuilding, and they never will be.

On the education bill, the provisions of that bill are now in operation, earlier than they would have been if we had taken legislation through this Parliament. We are getting on with delivery.

It is hard not to sympathise with the Tories, as they are leaderless and adrift. However, they have published a press release today that is bizarre and includes claims that are, simply, factually wrong. It is riddled with inaccuracies and misrepresentations. I could go through them one by one, but I will just give some of the highlights.

In the press release, the Tories claim that we have not introduced a family law bill, but I am afraid that we have introduced a family law bill. They claim that we have not introduced drug driving offences, but we pledged that we would do that in 2019 and they will come into force next month. They claim that the attainment gap is not closing, but it is—the gap is now at a record low. They claim that the digital growth fund was delayed—their own press release actually admits that it was delivered on time, but still claims that it was delayed. They claim that a recent report on early learning and childcare reveals that the expansion is not on track, but, in fact, the report explicitly and expressly says that it is on track for two-year-olds and three and four-year-olds. They use out-of-date figures for the Scottish growth

scheme, ignoring the fact that 201 companies have received £135 million of investment. Further, they then have the nerve to make a number of nonsense claims about social security. I really would have thought that the party of the rape clause and welfare cuts would have decided to keep quiet about social security.

More than anything, what is staggering is the hypocrisy of a party that has barely passed a single piece of meaningful legislation at Westminster in years and is right now trying to shut down Parliament. That hypocrisy is gobsmacking. Well, while the Tories shut down Westminster, the Scottish Government will concentrate on stepping up and delivering for the people of our country.

Jackson Carlaw: Burst the balloon and there is a lot of hot air there. This is the party that would sink the building of five frigates on the Clyde. It is rich for it to talk about its commitment to shipbuilding.

We do not even have to look back across the whole summer, or even the whole week, to see the SNP's failings. This morning alone, the Scottish Government's statistics exposed its failings on the NHS—4,000 empty nursing and midwifery posts and 500 empty consultant posts. In mental health, child and adolescent mental health services waiting times have risen again, with a third of vulnerable youngsters waiting too long for care. This summer, we learned that patients and staff, who are already putting up with the SNP's shambolic workforce planning, will also now have to wait for the opening of the new sick kids hospital serving the east of Scotland—a hospital that was supposed to have opened in 2012. Let us talk about a programme for government. On what date will it open?

The First Minister: On the NHS workforce, I am sure that Jackson Carlaw knows that staffing levels in the NHS have increased by more than 13,200 whole-time equivalent staff members since the SNP took office—that is a 10.4 per cent increase.

I will take no lectures on our national health service from the party of Brexit, which is currently cracking down on migration and sending a message to EU nationals, who are vital to our health and social care services, that they are not welcome in this country. Shame on the Conservatives for the damage that they are doing across the country.

On the Edinburgh sick kids hospital, it is clearly an unacceptable situation, but Jeane Freeman did what I hope that any responsible health secretary would have done and prioritised patient safety; she then took a number of actions to make sure that confidence and assurance could be given to

patients who would use that hospital. I cannot remember whether Jackson Carlaw was already here when I came into the chamber, but if he was here earlier today he will have heard the health secretary give an update and say, as she has previously made known, that when the two strands of work that she instructed—first, the NHS National Services Scotland work and, secondly, the audit of governance—report next week, she will make a further statement to the Parliament, to give certainty to patients across Edinburgh about the next steps for the hospital.

That is the responsible way to govern in these difficult situations. Again, when it comes to responsible governance, the Tories right now do not have a leg to stand on.

Jackson Carlaw: The responsible thing in government would have been to make good on the commitment to open the hospital on time in 2012.

This year, the First Minister's new batch of promises centres on climate change. Let us talk about our Government's climate record so far. It has missed a key recycling target by 12 years, it is barely half way to meeting a target on renewable heat generation and it has met just seven of 20 international biodiversity targets. Streets in Glasgow and Edinburgh are failing to meet legal standards on clean air.

What has the First Minister been doing this summer during the climate emergency that she declared? Well, she opened the new Edinburgh airport terminal, and earlier this year she burned the equivalent of half a tonne of coal when she jet-setted to the United States to push independence. We are behind the First Minister on the need to tackle climate change, but—between book festivals—is she really going to give it a shot this time?

The First Minister: First, we are on track to meet the recycling target. In the bizarre 30-point press release that they issued today, the Tories managed to accuse us of being 12 years behind in meeting a target that has not yet fallen due to be met. That is how ridiculous what they publish is, and that is how much they are grasping at straws.

We have set out a range of actions that we are taking. Scotland is already recognised by people who do not have the same axe to grind as Jackson Carlaw and the Tories have—that is, by international experts—as being ahead of the world when it comes to meeting our climate change targets and leading the world in the action that we are taking. What we set out today will take us even further down that road.

On Edinburgh airport, of course, some of the expansion is about the airport trying to meet its own environmental targets. Jackson Carlaw has

just criticised me for visiting Edinburgh airport, but in his press release today he criticises us for not going ahead with the cut in air departure tax. Jackson Carlaw has got to decide which side of the climate change debate he is on.

The fact of the matter is that we have the most ambitious climate change targets of not just anywhere in the UK but almost anywhere in the entire world, and we have the most ambitious programme of actions to meet those targets. It is probably embarrassment that is making Jackson Carlaw's face go a little bit red when he looks at the actions and achievements of this Government compared with the Government of his party, which is so obsessed with Brexit that it has forgotten how to do anything else.

Jackson Carlaw: Not my skin tone again. Listen, First Minister, at least I have a full head of my own, naturally coloured hair. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: All right. Order, please. [*Interruption.*] Order.

Jackson Carlaw: How typical it is that the First Minister's statement begins and ends with independence—it is literally her be-all and end-all. She has confirmed her plan to push ahead with her unnecessary and unwanted Referendums (Scotland) Bill, and, buried in the small print, we see that the SNP's utterly discredited white paper from 2014 is finally to be binned. She has made clear that, with no consensus across this Parliament, she—regrettably—intends to demand the power to hold a referendum on independence. Faced with that, Scottish Conservatives surely speak for the majority of Scotland when we say, "We have had enough. Just give it a rest."

The First Minister: Let us not gloss over the fact that, within a matter of days of the Scottish Conservative Party losing its female leader, the interim leader has managed to insult practically every woman in the country with that rather ill-advised quip at the start of his rather ill-advised rant.

When he has a bit more time, Jackson Carlaw might want to properly reflect on and digest the significant domestic policy agenda that I have just spent 40 minutes outlining to Parliament. He should also reflect on the fact that, over the past few days, we have had the revelation—I should say that I do not doubt the personal reasons that Ruth Davidson gave for her resignation, and I wish her well, as I did last week—that Ruth Davidson does not want to put up with Boris Johnson as leader of the Conservative Party. We have had the debate re-erupt in the Conservative Party about whether it is time for the Scottish Conservative Party to become independent, yet we still have a Conservative Party that is determined to deny the

right of the Scottish people to choose our own future with independence.

When I look at the chaos and the disaster that the Tories are leading the United Kingdom into, I make no apology for saying that I want Scotland to have the ability to choose a better, more hopeful and more positive and optimistic future. I want us to rejoin the family of independent nations, and I am determined that we will get that chance.

The Presiding Officer: I encourage all members and all party leaders, including the First Minister, not to make personal quips. [*Interruption.*] I ask members to stop pointing across the chamber and to think about their own comments.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank the First Minister for providing advance sight of her statement. I welcome the commitments on climate change and the undertaking that tackling the climate emergency will be woven into every aspect of government. I will address politics, not personalities.

A year ago, the First Minister told us:

"Closing the attainment gap and raising standards in our schools remains the Government's overriding mission."— [*Official Report*, 4 September 2018; c 20.]

Today, the First Minister commits to raising standards for all and says that she will continue to deliver the attainment fund until 2022, but that is clearly not enough. This summer's exam results show that the pass rate for highers has fallen for the fourth year running. When will the Scottish Government start to "raise standards for all"?

The First Minister: I am absolutely certain that, if Richard Leonard studies the figures—I am sure that he will have done—he will see, as I have referred to, that the attainment gap in our schools is at a record low. There is much more work to be done, but we can see the progress that is being made as a result of the actions that we have taken and the investments through the attainment fund that are leading to that narrowing.

As far as the higher pass rates are concerned, there will be fluctuations in the exam results from year to year. If the higher pass rate went up every year, Opposition politicians would tell us that the exams were getting too easy. If we look at national 5s, we can see that there has been an increase in the pass rate—if my memory serves me correctly, there have been particularly good increases in maths and English. At higher level, there has been a good increase in sciences.

We continue to take action to reform aspects of our education system and to invest where that is needed to narrow the attainment gap and increase standards, and we will continue to do that through

the range of actions that we have set out in today's programme.

Richard Leonard: I turn to another area. Last year, we welcomed the First Minister's commitment to adopt Labour's long-held policy to increase the provision of mental health support in communities, including schools. However, only one fifth of the promised investment in school counselling has been released, and community services for five to 24-year-olds are still in development. New figures that were published just this morning show that the Government's pace of change is clearly not quick enough, with more than 30 per cent of children and young people who are referred to mental health services not being seen within the 18-week target time.

Can the First Minister give assurances to families across Scotland? When will she ensure that the crisis in child and adolescent mental health services is finally addressed as a matter of national priority?

The First Minister: It is a matter of national priority, and the actions that we set out last year are being taken forward as we said they would be. For example, as I said in my statement, the first counsellors will be working in our schools in this school year. We have reached agreement with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the funding to ensure that all the counsellors are in place by this time next year. Our commitment to having additional school nurses is already being implemented, and we will be on target to meet that commitment in full.

On the introduction of new services, the community wellbeing service in particular has the potential to radically transform how children and adolescents access mental health services. Of course, that service is taking a degree of planning to implement, and we will move to its implementation over the year ahead. As I said, although the priority at this stage is the five-to-24 age group, we will also begin to explore how we can make such a service available to other age groups.

A key thing about the service is that it will not just be available for professionals to refer children to; children will be able to self-refer. That is an important way of making sure that more preventative services are available to relieve the pressure on our specialist services and that those specialist services are there for the young people who need them.

All that work is under way. I appreciate that Richard Leonard has raised issues in the past in relation to rejected referrals, on which we have also done a lot of work. We do not want any young person's referral to be rejected unless that is for clinical reasons.

This is a significant piece of priority work; it is under way, and it will continue to gather pace in the year ahead.

Richard Leonard: At the weekend, the First Minister wrote in a national newspaper that

"it is more important than ever that the Scottish Government continues to act in a calm, considered and consensual way."

Is the First Minister calm about housing costs continuing to rocket beyond people's means? Is she calm about reliance on food banks in Scotland being at an all-time high? Is she calm about public transport being run in the interests of profit, not passengers?

Given that the First Minister is calling for consensual working, I ask her to back our plans. Will she support the Mary Barbour bill to cap private sector rent rises? Will she support our plans to enshrine the right to food in law? Finally, will she support Labour plans for a publicly owned bus network and a publicly owned railway?

The First Minister: I am not calm about the fact that right now, Tory welfare cuts, Tory austerity and the Tory Government's Brexit obsession are driving more and more people in this country into poverty and to food banks. The difference between Richard Leonard and me is that I want to do something about that situation; I want to give people in Scotland the option of a different future—a better alternative—so that we can take control of those issues into our own hands, rather than leaving them in the control of a UK Tory Government.

I turn to the specifics that Richard Leonard raises. On the right to food, I have said that we are introducing a good food nation bill. Of course, we are open to discussion about provisions that others want to introduce. As we have done in the past, we will listen carefully to the points that are made.

On housing, we have taken action on rent levels in Scotland by introducing rent pressure areas. However, again, I am open minded about where further action could be taken, and I am happy to have constructive discussions with Labour or anybody else in the chamber. It is most important that we continue to invest in new housing to increase housing supply. In my own constituency alone, I have opened two new housing developments in the past two weeks—that is evidence of the £3.3 billion investment that we are making in affordable housing, and we will continue to take action through housing first to tackle homelessness.

We will discuss all those things with other members across the chamber. However, there is one thing that I am surprised by. I do not know whether Richard Leonard is about to ask me

another question but, given the number of times over the past year that he raised—understandably and rightly—the issue of an income supplement with me at First Minister’s question time, calling on us to introduce one, I am surprised that he has not commented on the fact that we are not only introducing a child payment but accelerating payment of it, to cover children under six, to Christmas next year, which is described by poverty campaigners as game changing. Having called for that for all those months, I am surprised that he did not find it within himself to warmly welcome it.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I, too, welcome Sarah Boyack and Beatrice Wishart to the Parliament. I join with everybody who hopes that none of us will be judged on the basis of having a full head of hair.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has adopted the language of a green new deal. We first proposed that in a debate in April, and our “Scottish Green New Deal” paper was published just last week. However, the Government has not yet taken on the central idea of a change of economic system. There is still a great deal of focus on consumer choices and as-yet-unproven future technology. For example, transport emissions are going up and not down, yet the programme for government focuses on things such as electric planes and battery trains. Maybe one day those will have a role, but they will not cut transport emissions now, and freezing active travel funding at less than a 10th of the trunk roads budget will not do so either.

Greens believe in free public transport. One step that the Government could take towards that now would be providing free bus travel for young people. That would be affordable, simple and popular, especially with the taxi service of mum and dad, and would shift journeys on to public transport now. Will the First Minister dispense with vague commitments such as consulting on options and working with stakeholders and just do that now?

The First Minister: Everything that we have proposed today on tackling climate change, for the short term, the medium term and the longer term, is important. I make no apology for some of the longer-term ambitions, which aim to ensure that Scotland is at the forefront of the technological advances that we need. That is how we will position ourselves to get the most economic benefit. We will continue to put forward plans to attract the investment that we need, to encourage behaviour change and to lead by example through the actions that we take.

Patrick Harvie said that we have frozen the active travel budget, but we have doubled it and

we are maintaining it at that doubled level, so his description is slightly disingenuous.

On public transport, today we have announced a really important commitment of more than £0.5 billion to design and implement priority bus schemes.

Patrick Harvie: The buses will still be expensive.

The First Minister: I will come on to the costs in a second.

When I speak to people in my urban constituency, I find that one of the biggest barriers to people using the bus more is longer journey times, or the perception of them. If we can decrease journey times and make bus travel more reliable and quicker, we will do a lot to encourage more people on to the buses.

On the costs of bus transport, we already spend more than £200 million a year on free bus travel for around one quarter of the population, which accounts for one third of all bus journeys in Scotland. The programme for government confirms our commitment to extend free bus travel to companions with disabled children and to young carers who receive the young carers grant. We are piloting an extension to modern apprentices and reviewing options for extending public transport concessions to people under 26. We are open for discussion on all of that.

When Labour came up with the idea of free bus travel but failed to do any costing on it, we looked at the numbers and found that we are talking about in the region of £400 million over and above what we already invest. I say that not as somebody who is opposed to the idea; it is simply a statement of reality. If parties genuinely want to get into that space, that is fine, but they have to come forward with ideas about where we get that money. I signalled today that we are open-minded on all those discussions but, as I so often say in the chamber—although it is not necessarily fair to direct this comment to the Greens—it is not enough to come forward with calls for more spending; members have to come forward with ideas about how we reshape our budget to pay for those things.

The Presiding Officer: I appreciate the detail of the programme, but I ask the First Minister to be slightly more succinct in her answers.

Patrick Harvie: Indeed, Presiding Officer—the First Minister could just have said yes to my proposal, which related to young people and which would cost one or two tens of millions of pounds. That is clearly affordable if the Government has the will to do it.

The focus on techno fixes tomorrow instead of change today goes beyond transport. Things have

not moved on from the first green new deal debate, when the Government was unwilling to accept that transition also means moving away from high-carbon industries. However many years the oil and gas industry has left to it, it is simply not plausible for the First Minister to use the rhetoric of the green new deal while saying that the fossil fuel industry has a bigger role to play in the future.

The First Minister even went so far as to describe carbon capture and storage as a renewable technology, which it very clearly is not. Working with the fossil fuel industry on a response to the climate emergency would be like working with the tobacco industry on a public health strategy. The First Minister wants us to accept that we cannot end the use of fossil fuels overnight, and I accept that. Does she accept that we already have far more fossil fuels in existing reserves than we can afford to use, and that exploration for ever more must come to an end?

The First Minister: Just before we leave the subject of buses, I do not know whether Patrick Harvie heard my original answer, because he went on to focus specifically on young people, but we are looking at the options for extending public transport concessions to people who are under the age of 26. That is under consideration and we will give details of the outcome as soon as possible.

I hope that Patrick Harvie listened carefully to what I said on oil and gas. I speak to young people, in particular, all the time who ask, "Why not stop and leave it in the ground?" I have sympathy with the sentiment behind that question. However, I have not heard Patrick Harvie address the point that doing that now would risk increasing emissions because of import substitution. We must have a managed, fair and just transition, and that is what we are working towards. However, I have been explicit today about the conditionality of our support and its emphasis on the transition away from fossil fuels into low-carbon and renewable sources. In my view, that is the right way to go and, again, we are ahead of most other countries in the world in that. I do not think that it is a matter of either/or between action now and looking to develop the technologies of the future. We have to do both, and if we do so cleverly and smartly, we will reap a lot of economic benefit in the process.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It is good to see Sarah Boyack back in the chamber, and it is an absolute delight to see Beatrice Wishart sitting right beside me.

When I stood here last year, I said that mental health waiting times for young people were unacceptable. Back then, 208 young people waited more than a year. Today, one year later, that number has more than trebled to 735, and the

number of suicides by young people has risen by 50 per cent.

The mental health strategy was delayed. Its funding was late. Workers remain unrecruited. Why is this Government letting down young people on mental health?

The First Minister: Willie Rennie raises important issues, so I will address them seriously. I do not agree with his characterisation at the end of his question, but I will leave that to one side.

Long waits for child and adolescent mental health services are unacceptable. We have been making reforms and investment to tackle those long waits, and there is work still to do. In recent years, we have invested more in CAMHS staffing; in the past year, we have invested £4 million in 80 additional CAMHS staff and we are starting to see the impact of that. We are taking forward the recommendations of the children and young people's mental health task force, with a strong focus on improving CAMHS, and I have already spoken about how we will further progress and implement the community and wellbeing service.

I do not think that it is fair to say that posts are unfilled; we have made a commitment over a period of time to increase the number of counsellors in our schools, the number of school nurses and the number of mental health professionals across different settings, and those commitments are being progressed. I have given some updates on them today and I am happy to provide more detail.

I do not underestimate the importance of the issue and we are going to stick at and deliver on the work that we are doing to make sure that the services are in the right place, so that specialist care is there for those who need it.

Willie Rennie: The trouble is that the First Minister tells me that every year, and the numbers continue to get worse. Progress is far too late and far too slow for young people right now, and it is not just mental health in which the Government is failing: it has a sick kids hospital with no sick kids; an energy company without energy customers; west coast ferries with no passengers; Shetland ferries with no funding; school testing with no support; buses with no passengers; and Scotrail trains with no crew. The First Minister tells us that she is tackling the climate emergency, but public transport is on its knees. Her Government backs Heathrow expansion and is dumping domestic waste in England.

This Government has truly taken its eye off the ball and, as we heard today at the beginning of the First Minister's statement, it is all really about independence. Why is the price of that being paid in communities across Scotland?

The First Minister: I do not think that Willie Rennie does himself any credit with that long list of hyperbole and misrepresentation. Across health, education, justice, climate change and public transport, yes, like all Governments, we face challenges, but we are getting on with meeting those challenges, making the investments and delivering the reforms that are about reshaping those services and delivering, and we will continue to do that. I make no apology.

I can sort of understand why the Tories will try to justify why Scotland should just put up with what is happening in the UK right now, with all the damage that it will bring down the track, but I do not understand why the Liberal Democrats argue for that as well. I do not believe that Scotland should be left powerless at the mercy of an increasingly right-wing Conservative Government that is prepared to do whatever damage it wants through Brexit. I want Scotland to have a better alternative to that and I am determined that Scotland will have a better alternative to that.

The Presiding Officer: We have a very large number of members wishing to ask questions but not enough time, so please be succinct. I call Bruce Crawford, to be followed by Murdo Fraser.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I add my congratulations to the returning Sarah Boyack and to Beatrice Wishart.

I very much welcome the announcement of £500 million to help transform bus priority infrastructure and routes, which forms one of the headlines of a substantial package of climate change action in the programme for government. Will the First Minister outline how the investment will help increase the uptake of bus services and improve the health of people in our towns and cities by reducing congestion and air pollution?

The First Minister: As I said to Patrick Harvie—and I am sure that we all experience this in our constituencies—one of the biggest barriers to people using the bus instead of cars is that they think that journeys will take longer. The investment is a capital investment. We will work with local authorities over the next year or so to design schemes in and around towns and cities to put in place priority bus routes so that we can have bus travel that is quicker and more reliable than it is now. That will help us to reduce congestion and reduce emissions in our towns and cities, which is, as Bruce Crawford rightly says, important for our health and wellbeing as well as for the environment.

We will also continue to maintain the doubled level of active travel investment to encourage people to walk and cycle more. I know that, in my constituency, that investment is delivering some

really ambitious schemes that will transform cycling and walking across the city.

This is all important stuff, and it is stuff that really matters to people, who are thinking about how they make a personal contribution to tackling the climate emergency.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister mentioned the Scottish Government's reaching 100 per cent programme to deliver superfast broadband to 100 per cent of Scottish households by 2021, and she said that the contract to deliver it will be awarded by the end of this year. However, in 2017, the Scottish Government told us that suppliers would be in place and ready to start building by early this year. Why is the programme already running one year late? By what date will Scottish householders have the superfast broadband that they are all waiting for?

The First Minister: I am genuinely quite shocked that Murdo Fraser has the audacity to go there, given the fact that digital connectivity and telecommunications, as the Westminster minister reminded me on Twitter last week, is a reserved matter. It is Scottish Government investment that has taken levels to more than 90 per cent, and it is Scottish Government investment that will take them to 100 per cent.

In terms of both coverage and the speeds offered, the R100 programme is way ahead of anything anywhere else in the UK. Of course we need to get value for money out of the bidders for the contract, which is why we are taking the time to get that right, but once we have delivered this and Scotland has the broadband connections that nobody else in the UK has, I will look forward to continuing this discussion with Murdo Fraser, who may or may not be in a different position by that time.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): The First Minister has always been a consistent champion of gender equality. It is a real shame that, with one glib comment, Jackson Carlaw has undone all his great work to tackle the disadvantages that women still face when it comes to their health. On behalf of organisations such as endo warriors West Lothian, I ask the First Minister to demonstrate how her programme for government will do more to address women's health inequalities.

The First Minister: I thank Angela Constance for raising an important health issue.

The programme for government has a commitment to develop a new women's health plan, which I know that the health secretary and the chief medical officer are very passionate about and committed to. More details of the plan will be shared with Parliament as it progresses, but it is

intended to include action to ensure rapid and easily accessible postnatal contraception, reduce inequalities in health outcomes that affect women in particular—for example, in relation to endometriosis and antenatal care—and improve services for women who are undergoing the menopause. It will also look at some of the inequalities in women's general health—cardiac services, for example, deal with one of the biggest killers in Scotland, but the interventions and medications often do not take into account the differences between men and women.

It is an important piece of work and I hope that it will be welcomed across the Parliament and that MSPs of all parties will engage closely with it.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister rightly describes Scotland's drug death crisis as a "public health emergency". Page 102 of the programme for government says that the Government is "doing everything" that it can. Could the First Minister really look thousands of bereaved families in the eye and repeat that claim to them? Is Parliament doing everything that it can, because I think that we are not?

Additional funding to tackle drugs harm is welcome and well overdue, especially against a backdrop of successive real-terms cuts to alcohol and drugs partnerships funding, which has fallen by 6.3 per cent since 2014.

The First Minister could seek to legally designate a public health emergency and urgently direct the resources of our public services to tackle the crisis. That is one of the actions that Scottish Labour has been calling for. As the First Minister agrees that the drug death crisis is a public health emergency, when will she instruct the public health minister to legally recognise the crisis for what it is?

The First Minister: I am genuinely not sure that I fully understand Monica Lennon's point about legal designation. We are saying quite clearly that it is an emergency and the actions that we take in response are commensurate with that description.

Monica Lennon asked me whether I could look families in the eye. I regularly meet families in my constituency who have been affected in one way or another by drugs and I talk to them about what they think works well and what needs to work better. Over the summer, I visited a project in my constituency, so I know that we need to focus on the deaths crisis in particular. It is a complex issue, but that does not mean that we should not and cannot have a properly joined-up approach to it.

Two years ago, I announced additional funding for drug and alcohol services. The extra funding that I have announced today is £10 million in each of the next two years, which I know from services

in my constituency will make a big difference. The drugs death task force will be instrumental in considering the existing and new approaches that could benefit from that money.

Lastly—and I think that we have the support of Labour on this—we have to do everything that we can with our powers, responsibilities and resources. However, there is a bigger issue about how effective and fit for purpose drug law is right now. We are seeing it with the debate over the facility in Glasgow that Glasgow City Council wants to establish, but there is also a more general issue.

We will continue to do everything that we can while recognising the emergency, but I hope that we can build even more consensus across the Parliament, as we need powers here in order to look at whether legislative reform can play a bigger part in the solution.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The announced investment in improving bus services is very welcome as part of a wider package to reduce emissions across all modes of transport. Will the First Minister set out in further detail her Government's plans for greener travel by car, rail and air?

The First Minister: We have to take action to reduce emissions across all modes of travel. Patrick Harvie was right to say that emissions from transport, which produces about a third of our total emissions, have been increasing. On car travel, our biggest measure is to set an ambitious target of 2032 for phasing out diesel and petrol cars. We have already invested a lot in a charging network and the partnership with the power companies that we announced last week will be vital in making sure that we can accelerate that progress and that the electricity grid infrastructure is there to support the network. We are also making more money available for people to buy electric or ultra-low-emission cars.

One of the big differences was probably not particularly caught by what I said in my statement. We are extending those loans to cover second-hand low-emission cars for the first time so that people do not have to buy new ones.

On bus services, I set out in my answer to Bruce Crawford the capital investment in buses. We also need to see greater investment in low-emission buses, and there is a role for the Scottish national investment bank in that.

On air travel, we want to encourage people not to use air travel when there are better alternatives but sometimes that is not the case, so I slightly take issue with Patrick Harvie on that. It is right to focus on how we get different technology to reduce aviation emissions.

Right across the spectrum, all those actions are about reducing emissions from transport. If we do not do that, we will not meet our overall targets and that will not be acceptable to us or to anybody else.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Scotland will soon receive just under £1.9 billion in Barnett consequentials, thanks to the UK Government's recent announcement of extra school funding in England. Will that additional funding be used to restore teacher numbers in Scotland?

The First Minister: Forgive me, Presiding Officer, but long and bitter experience as First Minister and health secretary before that has taught me to wait and see the colour of the Tories' money before we start spending it. Let us just wait and see whether it is netted off against savings elsewhere and what the actual money that comes to the Scottish Government might be. At that point, we will set out how we intend to invest any money.

Of course, it will have to be seen in the context of the cuts that have been made to our budget by Tory Governments since 2010. It has also to be seen in the context that, per head of population, we already spend more on health and education than the Westminster Government. As we do with all the resources that are at our disposal, we will continue to invest them in the best way to serve the interests of people across our country.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I welcome that the poorest families, including those in Maryhill and Springburn, will receive an additional £500 per child, and that the first payments for under-sixes will be delivered by Christmas next year. Will the First Minister provide further details about the welcome acceleration of that policy commitment? Will that commitment require the co-operation of the UK Government to ensure smooth delivery so that those who most need that cash will get it as soon as possible?

The First Minister: In relation to that, as in other aspects of our social security programme because of a range of factors, we need the co-operation of the UK Government, so we are in close contact with it and are counting on it to continue to give that co-operation.

As Aileen Campbell set out before recess, when she announced the new Scottish child payment, we required to do some further work on delivery over the summer. We have done a considerable amount of that work and are now confident that we can introduce the first tranche of the payment to children under six by Christmas next year. Applications will open in the autumn of next year, with the first payments being made before Christmas. That is a positive step.

We should remember that 60 per cent of all children who live in poverty live in a household in which there is a child aged under six, so the policy will make a huge difference. When it is fully rolled out, more than 400,000 children, which is more than a third of all children in our country, will benefit from it. It has the potential to lift 30,000 children out of poverty.

In fact, this is one of the most important things that the Government is doing, and I hope that those who have called for it, and those who have opposed it, will now get behind it because it is going to make a big difference to kids the length and breadth of Scotland.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The Scottish children's services coalition has shown that resources for pupils who have additional support needs have been cut by £889 per pupil since 2012. The funding that was announced today is about £75 per pupil so, no matter how welcome it is, it barely restores a tenth of those cuts. Does the First Minister understand how much those children and their families are being let down every day?

The First Minister: I do not want to rehearse past arguments, but within a difficult financial climate, we have treated local government fairly. Education spending is going up in councils, and that is important because it also enables resources to go to children who have additional support needs.

The extra funding that I announced today is important. I recognise that Iain Gray welcomed it after a fashion, but it is vital that we continue to direct resources to young people who most need them. As we set out plans for how that investment will make a difference, I accept that Iain Gray will still argue for more investment, as he is entitled to do. However, I hope that we will get good engagement and a welcome for the difference that this money can make to young people across the country.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I welcome the significant further £1 billion of investment in our schools. Can the First Minister confirm whether the programme will deliver low-carbon, digitally enabled learning environments for the benefit of pupils in my constituency and across the country?

The First Minister: Yes. Remember that we have already built or refurbished hundreds of schools, and this is a new £1 billion programme to build on that. Part of the objective is to ensure that schools for the future are low carbon and digitally enabled, and that they have better links to other parts of the community. The Deputy First Minister spoke earlier about the plans to co-locate Woodmill high school in Dunfermline with a new

college campus. Obviously, we have to have some discussions about what is best for that school, given what has happened, but that kind of connectivity is very important to how we want to see the programme develop. We will shortly set out the list of schools that will be the first to benefit from the programme, and I hope that many members will benefit from the programme in their areas.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Over the summer, I visited a number of drug and alcohol partnerships and services for drug users. I want to understand the progress that the First Minister and the Government are making on that, because many of our drug and alcohol partnerships are cutting funding for services and those services are closing as we speak. Does the First Minister intend to look at youth services? Last week, at the Lochee community hub in Dundee, I was told that Young Addaction is closing all services in secondary and primary schools. What action will the First Minister take now, and not after a task force?

The First Minister: This is an important issue. I had conversations over the summer with people in different services who expressed to me the view that the £20 million that we announced two years ago has not all got to the front line. I am not criticising alcohol and drug partnerships but, clearly, that is something that we have to focus on.

I was very deliberate in what I said about the additional money that I have announced today being there to support existing services, as well as any new approaches that the drugs task force may come up with. It is important that we have that twin approach. I do not want to say too much more, because there is work to be done in discussion with some of the stakeholders about where the money is best spent. However, I acknowledge the point about existing services and recognise that we should have that very much at the front of our minds.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Figures show that, although youth unemployment in Scotland is consistently lower than in the rest of the UK, it remains higher than unemployment in other age groups. Can the First Minister assure my younger constituents, especially those on low incomes, that the Government's plans will aid them into work?

The First Minister: I hope that that assurance can flow from the programme for government. We are very committed to ensuring that our employability system provides the support that people need when they need it, regardless of their age and circumstances. Building on the principles of fair start Scotland, we are developing a new approach to employability services. The aim is to support those who are furthest away from the

labour market by creating a much more joined-up and flexible approach. The new job start payment will help young people in particular who have had a long period of unemployment and are trying to move into work with some of the added expense that they will incur, for example buying clothes for a new job or buying a bus pass in order to get to work. Those are all important measures to help those who need the most help to access work.

Unemployment is very low in Scotland, and youth unemployment is much lower than it was a few years ago, but we know that there are still people who need that extra help, and we are determined to ensure that they get it.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The recent rise in homelessness applications was not referenced in the programme for government. What measures will the Scottish Government take to support local authorities to meet their statutory duties to homeless people, particularly in the light of Shelter's action against Glasgow City Council, which denied homeless people their legal rights more than 3,000 times? I put on record my support for homelessness prevention for women, but does the First Minister think that it is time for a broader legislative duty on all local authorities and public authorities to prevent homelessness?

The First Minister: I am always prepared to consider arguments for additional legislation. Our legislative programme this year, as in past years, will demonstrate that there is definitely a role for legislation in ensuring that public bodies are focused on the things that they need to be focused on. I am open to that discussion, and I do not have a fixed view one way or the other at this stage.

When it comes to rising homelessness applications and redesigning the services that we provide for homeless people, we do not need to wait for legislation. There is work that we are getting on with and which we will continue to do. We know that the main reason why homelessness applications are rising is down to austerity and welfare cuts, but we also know that we need a better response for people. That is why rapid rehousing and housing first are so vital.

In response to the first part of the question, I say that we work closely with local authorities to make sure that we give them the support that they need to fulfil their statutory duties, and we will continue to do so.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I welcome the £20 million to tackle drug deaths, some of which, sadly, are of my constituents. Can the First Minister give any more detail? For example, will it tackle the underlying problems that lead people on to drugs, protect them from organised crime that sells them drugs and make it safer to take drugs?

The First Minister: In short, yes. Those are all the kinds of things that we need to tackle if we are to holistically tackle the emergency situation that we face. I mentioned the new inclusive Scotland fund, which will specifically involve people with multiple deprivation and disadvantage and lived experience of some of these issues in shaping the services that people need. I hope that that gives some positive indication to John Mason. I am clear that we will want to discuss with the task forces and alcohol and drug partnerships exactly where the money would be best targeted, and we will ensure that Parliament is kept updated as those decisions are taken.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The First Minister said last year that her Government would give victims a greater say before temporary release from prison, which is a promise that has been broken. The First Minister said last year that the Government would give criminal justice social work £100 million, which is a pledge that has been betrayed. Why should victims of crime trust a single thing that the First Minister says today?

The First Minister: I simply do not think that that is true or borne out in reality. In the past year, we have agreed to the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill and established a victims task force, which is looking at the changes that need to be made to give victims a bigger say, which we know they want in some decisions; for example, they want a bigger say on the impact of crimes, when that is taken into account for sentencing or when decisions are taken about the release of prisoners, whether home detention curfew, early release or parole. All the things that we set out in the programme for government last year are being taken forward and we will continue to make sure of that. The victims task force helps to ensure that the victims' voice is at the heart of all those decisions.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I welcome the package of measures that has been announced to benefit people who are care experienced. It may not be obvious to everyone why the extension of free dental care is so important, so could the First Minister set out how it will help young people with care experience?

The First Minister: That is an issue that I did not immediately realise was important. As members know, I have spent a lot of time with care-experienced young people and it was not obvious to me until they set it out and explained it to me. If young people who have had disruption to their childhood have moved around a lot, have had a unsettled upbringing through no fault of theirs and have not been able to access regular dental care when they were children or young people, the impact can mean that serious dental issues will

occur later in life. That can harm their confidence and blight their employment prospects and personal lives, so it is important.

As with a lot of these issues, when we stop to think about them, we realise that some quite straightforward solutions make a big difference. While we wait for the independent care review's report, we are taking the approach that, where there are changes that become obvious and can be done now, we are getting on and doing them. That is why the additional package that I announced today is important; I hope that it will be seen as a down payment on the commitment that we have given to care-experienced young people.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): I declare an interest as a parent of a child who is in receipt of disability living allowance.

I welcome the announcement of the launch of disability assistance for children and young people. Ask any parent who claims on behalf of their child and they will tell you that the application and renewal process is onerous, bureaucratic and distressing. Ahead of the launch next summer, will the Scottish Government take a different approach to application and, crucially, renewal?

The First Minister: In short, yes. I hope that, across all the work that we have been doing on social security, there is recognition that we want to take an approach to how people interact with the system that is much more dignified and less complex and bureaucratic and which does not make people—in this case, parents—feel as if they need to jump through hoops and go through pain and torture in order to get what they are entitled to. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People would be happy to speak to any member about exactly how we plan to do that in the case of disability assistance for children and young people. Ensuring that dignity and ease of access are at the heart of the system is a priority, as it has been for all the benefits that we have introduced and will be for all those that we will introduce.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement on the programme for government. I apologise to the seven members who could not ask their questions. I hope that there will be other opportunities.

Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Time is tight, so I would like members to take their positions as soon as possible. The next item of business is a statement by Derek Mackay on Ferguson Marine. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work (Derek Mackay): I am grateful for the opportunity to provide Parliament with an update on Ferguson Marine shipyard. As I have made clear to Parliament on numerous occasions, my dealings with Ferguson have been guided by three objectives: securing the completion of the two vessels that are being built for the Caledonian MacBrayne fleet, protecting the jobs of the 350-strong workforce and ensuring a future for shipbuilding at the yard.

On 9 August, the directors of Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd filed a notice of intention to appoint administrators, which, in effect, started the process of putting the business into administration. Administrators from Deloitte were then appointed by the first-ranking creditors to the business, HCCI. In response to that series of events, and to ensure that our objectives could be met, the Scottish Government has taken Ferguson Marine into public control while the administrators complete a marketing process, which is expected to last another two to four weeks. As part of the agreement that we have entered into with the administrators, we expect to acquire Ferguson at the end of that process if no viable commercial offer is forthcoming during that period.

We did not take that course of action lightly. The Scottish Government has been working for more than two years to find a resolution to the difficulties at Ferguson. Throughout that time, our preference has been to identify viable commercial options to keep the yard going and to finish the vessels. No such solutions have come forward.

Through its actions in relation to the contract with FMEL, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd has acted to secure the vessels and protect public money. At FMEL's request, we convened a series of meetings between the parties to seek a resolution. An independent view of the merits of the claim that was submitted by FMEL was carried out for the Scottish Government. We advised the interested parties in confidence of the outcome, but it would not be appropriate to share the opinion further. However, it did not offer any legal basis for the Scottish Government or CMAL to pay

FMEL more than the fixed-price contract. Of course, FMEL was free to pursue its claim in court at any point over the past two years.

We have been working to secure a future for the shipyard, and I am disappointed that we were not able to reach a commercial solution with Clyde Blowers Capital that would have prevented the appointment of administrators. We fully considered Clyde Blowers Capital's proposal to continue running the yard, but we concluded that it contained a number of serious risks and could not be taken forward. The proposal offered no certainty on the overall final cost of the vessels and saw no money from CBC invested in the yard. There were also serious concerns that entering into the proposal would have been unlawful. Parliament will understand that, in seeking a solution to the issue, I could not and would not act outwith the law.

We were unable to accept CBC's proposals, but the Scottish Government has supported the business significantly in recent years, including in providing a commercial loan of up to £30 million in June 2018 for working capital and to support diversification, in addition to a £15 million loan that was provided in September 2017. Those loans were provided to diversify the business and on the basis of a pipeline of work that FMEL indicated that it could win. We will use part of that £45 million loan to fund a credit bid for the yard.

It is important to make the right economic intervention on a case-by-case basis. In the case of Ferguson Marine, it is vital that the CMAL contracts to build the two new ferries are completed. They will provide crucial additional tonnage for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services network and help to support the economies and lives of our island communities.

There is also a need to protect the Scottish Government's position under the commercial loans that have been made to the FMEL group. The alternative would have been the Scottish Government walking away, the company going into administration, the yard potentially closing, jobs being lost, and the vessels not being completed. That was not an option that I was willing to accept.

On setting in place a structure to take the business forward, we have appointed Tim Hair as turnaround director of the business. He will focus on stabilising the business, establishing the financial position, and putting in place a programme to complete the two ferries in the shortest time possible, while ensuring value for money to the taxpayer.

For some months, we pressed FMEL for the cost to complete and delivery dates for the vessels. At no time has it given certainty on those

matters. Developing a revised cost analysis that thoroughly establishes all the actions that are required to complete the CMAL vessels will be one of the main tasks for the business. We will work closely with the management to create a clear understanding of the costs of completing the two vessels, and we are already working to meet valid debt claims to suppliers.

To aid that work, I have formed a programme review board to work to secure the most effective delivery programme for the CMAL vessels to completion in terms of time, cost and impact on the workforce. The group includes representatives from key stakeholders and sector experts, including Transport Scotland, Marine Scotland, David MacBrayne Ltd, Scottish Enterprise, CMAL and representatives from the on-site workforce. The group will establish the cost and timescales to complete the vessels and will monitor the progress of delivery against those new milestones. A key focus over the coming weeks will be to get that task right and set the yard on the right path to show that it can deliver to programme and cost.

Alongside that, the turnaround director will take forward steps to stabilise the business and support the recruitment of an incoming management team, including a chief executive officer, which will refocus efforts on completing those vital contracts.

On 16 August, I met the excellent workforce and stressed the Scottish Government's commitment to achieving the best possible outcome for the yard. We have also been working closely with trade union representatives throughout the process, and we will continue to do so in the coming days and weeks. This has been a difficult time for staff at the yard and their families, and we have been keen to reassure Ferguson's skilled workforce of our commitment throughout the process.

My focus is—and has always been—on ensuring the completion of the two public sector ferries for the best value for money for the taxpayer while working towards the delivery of the other vessels that are currently under construction at the yard and, in doing so, securing jobs for the workforce through continuity of employment.

As for the future of the yard, we remain committed to working towards finding a solution to support future shipbuilding at the site. While the CMAL vessels are completed, the Scottish Government will continue to conduct further work to identify a viable future structure for the yard. The Scottish Government will at all times remain open to discussions with any parties that are interested in securing a viable commercial future for the yard, but we will also explore the option of keeping the yard in public ownership and how that might secure a lasting future for shipbuilding on the lower Clyde.

Throughout the process, the Scottish Government has worked in good faith to secure the vessels, the jobs and the yard. When we were presented with the prospect of the company entering into administration, we acted quickly and decisively to ensure that those objectives could be met and the yard did not close. Although it is clear that there is much work yet to do, our actions have ensured that there will be a tomorrow for Ferguson.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank the cabinet secretary for giving me back an extra minute. Time is tight.

The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in the statement. I intend to allow until 4.32; we must then move on to the next item of business.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of today's statement. However, it was delivered without a hint of irony—everybody knows that the yard is in such a mess because of his and his Government's actions. The question is not whether we save jobs; the real question is how we will save those jobs. Today's statement raises more questions than it answered.

I will ask some simple and straightforward questions, and I hope that we get some simple answers from the cabinet secretary. On the dispute between the Government and the yard, is the cabinet secretary happy with the levels of mediation and arbitration that took place, and will he publish details of the serious events that led us to where we are today?

On the timelines for delivering the new ferries, when will they actually be delivered? They are two years late already, so islanders want to know. What will be the cost to complete the ferries, given that they are now 100 per cent over budget? On the future of the yard, will the cabinet secretary's plans to nationalise the yard create more or fewer jobs than the plans that Ferguson Marine's owners had to grow the business? For the sake of transparency, will the cabinet secretary agree today to a full public inquiry into the entire fiasco?

Derek Mackay: I will work through those questions. First of all, it is entirely for Parliament to decide how it conducts its business. I will make myself available for whatever Parliament chooses to do by way of transparency on the issue. However, Mr Greene will be disappointed to find that, at every stage of the process, the Government has acted in the interests of the people of Scotland and, particularly, the people of Inverclyde, which Jamie Greene has not done since he entered Parliament. I will make myself available to the Finance and Constitution

Committee, and I am, as was programmed, answering questions today.

On costs, I have made it clear to the public that I am establishing a programme review board that will consider the costs and timescales for completion of both the vessels and the other work that is already at the yard. Given that we have not had certainty from FMEL on the current position in relation to costs and timescales, Mr Greene will understand that we deserve the time to ensure that when I present those timescales and costs, they are robust and stand up to scrutiny. We will get those figures to Parliament as soon as we have them. Of course I commit to transparency; that is why I am making myself available.

On the dispute between CMAL and FMEL, there were Government processes and we tried to assist. As I said, we sought opinion on that and we had procurement officials consider it—we went through it all to ensure that there was the necessary diligence that anyone would expect. However, let us bear it in mind that it was a design-and-build fixed-price contract. I have offered to the Finance and Constitution Committee information on the loans that were provided.

Despite the pejorative language of the Conservatives, the reality is that when it comes to action, we invested in the yard. We saved the jobs, we will give Ferguson Marine a future, we will complete the vessels and we will deliver for the communities of Scotland. That is what this Government will do, which is in sharp contrast to the party that tried to deindustrialise Scotland when it was in office.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of the statement.

Labour supports action that secures jobs at the Port Glasgow shipbuilders. The workforce at the yard has been caught in the middle of a dispute that was not of its making. However, their skills and expertise will be crucial in getting us out of the crisis, as will fully understanding what caused it in the first place. We have had two years of claim and counterclaim between Ferguson Marine and CMAL over a contracting process that has failed to deliver and was never fit for purpose in the first place.

Does the cabinet secretary accept the need for a proper inquiry into the events that led to the yard going into administration? For the long term, does he also accept the need for him to tell us and, more important, the workforce, where exactly the work that will secure the yard and others into the future will come from—particularly in the absence of a proper national shipbuilding strategy from the Government, which the workforce has called for time and again?

Derek Mackay: I appreciate some of the comments that have been made by the Labour Party. I hope that it continues to co-operate with me to ensure that the yard has a future, because that is exactly what I am working towards—completing the vessels and all the construction that is currently under way at the yard, securing the jobs into the future and giving the yard a future. There are more decisions to be taken that will achieve that outcome. Those are my objectives, and I have mentioned them to the workforce.

The Conservatives have tried to accuse me of lack of transparency on Parliament's first day back after the summer recess. I have given a statement, I am answering members' questions and I am making myself available to the Finance and Constitution Committee. I will answer questions that are asked of me, but members should be under no illusion about my objectives, which are to save Ferguson Marine, to give it a future, to protect the workers and their families by protecting their jobs, and to ensure that we complete the vessels that the CalMac fleet requires. I will do what it takes to achieve that outcome, and I hope that I have Parliament's support to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have 12 members wanting to ask questions. I want short questions, so that we can get in as many as possible. Can Stuart McMillan set an example, please?

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary provide further information on how his decisive actions have helped to secure stable employment at the yard? How does he see the situation progressing in the coming months? His decisive approach is in very stark contrast to what we have heard today from the Tories, who want the yard to shut.

Derek Mackay: Let us bear it in mind that, essentially, the company directors were heading for administration, so if the Government had not taken the action that it has taken, the yard would have been closed, jobs would have been lost and the vessels might never have been completed.

Through our actions, the yard remains open and we have saved the jobs. I commit to giving the yard a future, and we will complete the vessels. The people of Scotland expect that type of action, which was in the local and national interest. The alternative would have been unthinkable.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We have known for two years about the dispute between CMAL—a wholly owned Scottish Government company—and Jim McColl, one of the First Minister's economic advisers. For two years, Jim McColl has been asking the

Government to intervene. Why has it taken it two years to do anything? Is it true that the CMAL board threatened to resign en masse if the Government intervened? How much has the delay in acting cost the taxpayer?

Derek Mackay: There was absolutely no delay in acting. I am delighted that Paul Wheelhouse is in the chamber—he has been updating Parliament on the timetabling issues with information that we have, essentially, received from FMEL. As information was presented to me, I have engaged with officials to probe that information in order to try to ensure that the necessary work was going on between CMAL and FMEL—the client and the contractor.

We have tried to provide commercial support—the Government intervened with loans to support diversification of the yard. The yard was heading for administration, jobs could have been lost and the vessels might not have been completed, so a range of actions have been taken over the past two years.

It is quite clear from the noise that is being made by the Conservatives that they would, when push comes to shove, have walked away, jobs would have been lost, vessels would not have been completed and the yard would have been closed. How do I know that that would be the case? There is another shipyard in the United Kingdom about which the UK Government has said that it has no role because it is a commercial matter. We happen to believe that people's livelihoods and their jobs matter. Ours was the right economic intervention, and we will see it through. We have acted in good faith throughout, and the people of Inverclyde see that.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary has acknowledged, island communities, not least those in my constituency in North Uist and Harris, have waited a long time for the vessels to enter service. The estimated completion dates are continually being put back. Given the existing pressures on the CalMac fleet, when does he anticipate island communities will have reliable information about when the new ferries will be delivered?

Derek Mackay: I have outlined a programme of work that should give me that robust information, and it should be possible to present that to members by the end of October.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): It is true that Ferguson's asked the cabinet secretary and the First Minister time and again to intercede. It is true that it asked CMAL at least 14 times to agree an independent naval architect and marine engineer to resolve the problem and that CMAL said no 14 times.

The Government and its agency CMAL showed no leadership, did little to support the workforce early on and refused help from independent experts. Will the cabinet secretary show leadership now? When will he sort out CMAL?

Derek Mackay: I am delighted that the workforce in Ferguson's, who I visited on the day that the Scottish Government pursued public control, welcomed the Scottish Government's intervention. If Jackie Baillie will forgive me, I will take the views of the workforce from the workforce and not from her press releases.

We have shown leadership on this issue. We have intervened to ensure that Ferguson's will have a future. We have also, throughout the period, tried to ensure that there is a commercial way forward for FMEL.

Here is the thing: ministers of the Scottish Government must act in terms of value for money, in the public interest and within the law. If there was a viable commercial solution to the issue, I would have preferred to have pursued that legal, competent and viable solution. In the absence of such a legally compliant and value-for-money solution, we had to look at the range of interventions that we could make. The option that I was not willing to take was that of walking away. Therefore, we have intervened. We have done the right thing and we will ensure that there is a future for Ferguson's.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): How many jobs in total, including in the supply chain, would have been lost if we had just abandoned the yard to market forces, as the Tories believe we should have? How much longer would the islanders on Arran and in the Hebrides have had to wait for their new ferries if FMEL had been allowed to close—an outcome that, for ideological reasons, the Tories seemed happy to see?

Derek Mackay: I understand that, currently, there are 343 jobs in FMEL. Those jobs were at risk because of the predicament that Ferguson's was in as a result of FMEL's decisions in the approach to administration. I believe that those were the jobs that were at risk. In moving so quickly, we were able to ensure that, at the point at which we were able to intervene in terms of public control, no staff were let go. That is significant because, when we look at the further work that will be required, it is clear that we will have to look positively at employment. I have been clear that one of our three objectives was to sustain employment at the yard, and that is what we have done.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The Scottish Green Party supports the Scottish Government's action with regard to taking

Ferguson's into public control. However, the cabinet secretary will also be aware that there is an ageing fleet and that resolving matters in relation to the two vessels in question is not sufficient. The future of our ageing fleet, and the necessary replacement of boats, cannot be conditional on private profit. To use his own words, will the cabinet secretary "see it through" and secure that long-term future of the yard by keeping it in public ownership?

Derek Mackay: The question of public ownership and public control is a good one. Public control could lead to public ownership in terms of the administrators' decisions. We are not talking about an ideological position—the Greens might have a different position on the matter. The action that we took was a pragmatic intervention to achieve the objectives, which concerned the jobs, the vessels and the yard. I want the optimal structure that gives the maximum amount of work to Ferguson's so that it has a future. Of course, that comes back to the question whether we need to replace and invest in the ferry fleet. Yes, we do. Is there the prospect of other work going to Ferguson's, too? Yes, there is. I am approaching the issue on a case-by-case basis, making sure that we have the right economic intervention and that our structures optimise the amount of work that can go to the yard. The outcome of that process is in the hands of the administrators. Clearly, we have created a strong position in terms of public control and public ownership. However, what is more important than the governance structure is the objectives. If we agree with the objective that we should complete the vessels that the CalMac fleet requires and which will secure the jobs and give the yard a future, we should focus on that, and that is what I am doing.

Of course, we need a further investment strategy around the replacement and upgrading of vessels. There is a question mark around the standardisation of vessels, as well. Those are all matters that should be considered as we look to the future, and that is what we are doing.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Did the CMAL board threaten to resign?

Derek Mackay: I am not the accountable minister for CMAL. The reason why I make that point is because I am answering in relation to finance and the economy. I am not aware of the position that members have expressed to me. I am answering members' questions. I really think that Opposition members should look to the facts that have been expressed in Parliament today, rather than to the headlines that they would like to believe are true.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alex Neil, and I might be able to squeeze in Dean Lockhart, depending on the next answer.

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): In the interests of transparency, will the cabinet secretary publish the reports and the correspondence of the commodore who was appointed to undertake a review of the contract and FMEL's performance? It seems reasonable that that information should be in the public domain.

My second question is—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I am sorry Mr Neil, but that will have to do.

Derek Mackay: It is fair to say that, under the Scottish ministerial code, the Government's legal advice is private. However, I am engaging with the Parliament today and I understand that I will see the Finance and Constitution Committee this week—that might well be in private session.

If Parliament wants further information, I want to be as transparent as possible, as I think that I have said. However, it would be wise of all members to fully consider all the facts, rather than just aspects that might suit their political narratives or arguments. I am trying to be as transparent as possible in answering members' questions.

There is a range of information that we should consider here. Fundamentally, ministers have to act within the law, and that is what I have done: I have acted within the law, on advice that I have been given.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given the cabinet secretary's plans to nationalise Ferguson Marine, what risk assessment has he made in relation to the yard losing potential and existing contracts with the UK Government and other counterparties as a result of European Union state aid rules?

Derek Mackay: The member should probably just spit it out if he is talking about the impending announcement on Ministry of Defence contracts. If that is what he is referring to—*[Interruption.]* Okay—the member is not quite sure what he is asking about. That is fine.

I confirm that, as I have already said to Parliament, we will ensure that the governance arrangements and structures optimise the amount of work that the yard can receive. There are choices around the governance arrangements, and if we go from public control to public ownership, there are issues to do with how the company could be structured to do complementary work. My focus is also on the potential for other work, and we want a structure that ensures that Ferguson can take the work, should that be the outcome of a preferred bid in terms of contracts that are currently in play.

To answer the member's question, I do not believe that the Government's actions will deter work from coming to the yard, because I am

making our objectives clear and the structure will ensure that we can maximise opportunities. I hope that the member understands what I am telling him. If he does, he will know that this is in the best interests of the yard.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions. I apologise to Neil Bibby and John Mason, whom I failed to reach.

European Union Farming Funding (Convergence Funds)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a statement by Fergus Ewing on the repatriation of convergence funds that are owed to Scottish farming. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:33

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): This Government, with the support of this Parliament, has been campaigning for many years for the repatriation of the European Union convergence funds that are owed to Scottish farming. We have been united in our endeavour to achieve that and I thank all members, across all parties, for their support and efforts.

There have been developments since the issue was previously discussed in the chamber, on which I want to update members.

First, I think that it would be helpful to set out the circumstances and history behind the issue. In 2013, the EU announced that a process of external convergence should occur between member states, as it considered that historic allocations of common agricultural policy support, which were based on production levels in the 1990s and early 2000s, were no longer meeting the objectives for farming and food production. Therefore, any member state whose average direct payment rate was less than 90 per cent of the EU average in 2013 would be awarded a convergence uplift, to take it at least to €196 per hectare by 2020.

England, Wales and Northern Ireland were each, on average, already above the 90 per cent of EU average convergence threshold in 2013. However, direct payments in Scotland were significantly lower on average, at €130 per hectare. Indeed, they were low enough to pull the overall United Kingdom rate below the convergence threshold.

As a result of Scotland's low payment rate, the UK was awarded an uplift of €223 million of additional CAP funding to cover the 2014 to 2020 period. Despite the fact that the EU's rationale for convergence funding was to narrow the payment gap across the EU, the UK Government chose to distribute the money across the UK Administrations based on the historic allocations formulae that were used for all other CAP money allocations. That meant that Scotland received only 16.3 per cent of the uplift, despite being the

only part of the UK that was, on average, below the EU's convergence threshold.

There is no doubt that that was neither equitable nor within the spirit of the EU's aims for convergence. The Scottish Government tried to prevent it from happening, my predecessor, Richard Lochhead, corresponded furiously with his UK Government counterparts and the Scottish Parliament agreed unanimously to support the case for repatriation of the convergence funding, but all to little avail. The UK Government would not budge.

On being appointed Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, I took up the cudgels and was determined not to lay them down again until every avenue had been explored and every effort made to win Scotland's case. In October 2017, I brought the issue back to Parliament to secure on-going support from across the chamber. In addition, I engaged stakeholders, including NFU Scotland, the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, Scottish Land & Estates, the Scottish Beef Association, the National Sheep Association in Scotland and the Scottish Crofting Federation, all of which agreed to work in partnership with us to press the case with the UK Government. They did so, and I thank them all for helping to keep the matter firmly at the forefront of UK ministers' minds.

The UK Government might have imagined that the issue would fade away with the prospect of Brexit, but if anything, that only served to underscore the urgency of the matter and the necessity of resolving it. Therefore, I determined to raise it at every opportunity with the then Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs secretary, Michael Gove. Although I suspect that I might simply have worn him down, in fairness, I must convey my gratitude to him for finally agreeing, in late 2017, to conduct a review. We might not have got the terms of reference that we wanted—they were changed such that the focus of the review would be solely on future funding allocations; I understand that that change was made at the behest of the UK Treasury—but, under the chairmanship of Lord Bew, a review has been undertaken. First, I thank the Scottish Government officials for their input to making Scotland's case robustly to the panel. Secondly, I thank Scotland's representative on the Bew panel, Jim Walker, for his sterling efforts on behalf of Scottish farming and for all the time that he has devoted to the task. Jim has ensured that Scotland's case and voice have been heard. He has applied himself to the task that was asked of him with customary gusto and tenacity—frankly, we could not have asked for more.

I understand that the review has reached its conclusions, and I look forward to those being published. I hope that the review panel has

accepted Scotland's case as being substantial and compelling. Support has come from perhaps surprising quarters in recent times. Many people might have been surprised that Boris Johnson, in his campaign to be elected to lead the Conservative Party, unequivocally promised to pay out additional funding to Scottish farming in 2020 and again in 2021. Although I do not intend to make a habit of it, I am happy on this singular occasion to say that I agree with the Prime Minister that we must

“make sure that Scotland's farmers get the support that they are owed.”

Where I would disagree with him is on the idea that this “historic injustice”—to use the phrase that he deployed—came about as a result of the CAP. It was caused entirely by his predecessor Government.

What matters now is that Boris Johnson is willing to put matters right. Therefore, I welcome his further pledge, which was given to a Scottish National Party MP in the House of Commons, so to do. What concerns me is that subsequent exchanges with DEFRA, and exchanges that my colleague Derek Mackay has had with the Treasury, have not confirmed that the £160 million that Scotland is owed will be transferred.

My intention today is to encourage this Parliament to unite once again in calling on the Prime Minister to make good his promise and to do so swiftly. Further, I hope that I can secure support in affirming, as we did in a debate earlier this year, that agriculture is a devolved competence—it is a policy responsibility that we have been dealing with for two decades now—and that we send the very clear message to the Prime Minister, to DEFRA, to the Treasury and to anyone else in the UK Government who needs to hear it that if we receive the £160 million owed to Scottish farming, and indeed the future allocations as pledged, all the funding comes without strings. There can be no attempt to bind or determine how the funding is to be used or disseminated—that is this Parliament's responsibility

I want to reassure members about this Government's intentions should we receive what we have been promised. I have secured the agreement of my colleague Derek Mackay, the finance secretary, that all additional convergence funding received will be ring fenced for agriculture. That is only right and proper, given its origins and its purpose, and that is what this Government will do. I understand that people want to get on with spending this funding, but I caution them that we have yet to receive any funding and we cannot spend warm words.

Today, I hope that we can come together as a Parliament and focus on the final part of this six-

year-long campaign to ensure its success and the delivery of the funding that is owed to Scottish farming. In doing so, I offer the reflection that this Parliament is often at its best when we can act together and support with one voice a campaign to repatriate money that, plainly, is in the interests of our farmers and crofters, who face very real and pressing challenges in the short and medium term, as we all know.

Therefore, I urge all colleagues in all parties to use today's opportunity to reaffirm their support for the repatriation of the convergence funding that is owed to Scottish farming, in the hope and belief that our collective efforts will shortly result in success. Scotland's farmers and crofters deserve no less.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ewing. The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. We need to be very prescriptive today—I can allow 18 minutes for questions and then we will move on.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I declare an interest as a partner in a farming business.

I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of his statement. We all agree in this chamber that the EU convergence fund should have come in its entirety to Scottish agriculture. There has always been cross-party support for that stance. The cabinet secretary recognises many of the organisations that have made that argument, but he neglects to mention the 12 new Scottish Conservative MPs who were elected last year, who have also been working hard to achieve a successful result.

The Prime Minister has promised to deliver the fund to Scotland and we will hold him to account on that promise, but given the complete lack of planning by this Government for future agricultural support, how does the cabinet secretary propose to spend this money when it is delivered? It will not be acceptable to spend the money on any one sector of Scottish agriculture. It must be delivered right across all sectors, not just used to plug the hole in less favoured areas and LFASS—less favoured area support scheme—payments that has been created by this Government's inability to plan ahead. Can the cabinet secretary promise that he will not use it to do just that?

Fergus Ewing: I think that I discerned support there for the campaign—

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Just.

Fergus Ewing: Just. It was a positive start and I welcome that.

I also welcome the fact that politicians who are elected representatives from Scotland have supported this campaign. In all seriousness, I think that when we can act together, it helps to deliver results. I hope that that will be the case on this occasion. That is why I am approaching the debate in this way.

As to the disbursement of the money, if I promise to you, Presiding Officer, that the cheque is in the post, I suspect that your reaction may well be one of scepticism. I make it clear that not only is the cheque not in the post, but it is not yet signed.

Richard Lyle: It is not even written.

Fergus Ewing: Indeed. Therefore, it is premature to start spending money that we do not have. That is a pretty solid message that every farmer in Scotland would understand. However, I have already given the absolute assurance that Mr Mackay—whom I have consulted on the matter in the formal way that is absolutely appropriate in Government—has confirmed that the money will be used solely for Scottish agriculture. That assurance, which I have announced today, is welcome.

Mr Chapman used the phrase “plug a hole” in relation to LFASS funding. That is not correct, because there is no hole in LFASS funding. The problem is that the rules that attach to LFASS mean that the payments might have to go from 100 per cent to 80 per cent next year. I have previously indicated my determination to do what I can to maintain income for hard-pressed farmers—our hill farmers and other LFASS farmers—who perhaps need it the most. I fully intend to make good on that promise. It would help if the UK made good on its promise, which would allow us to provide a real boost to agriculture in these challenging times.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing advance sight of his statement.

Labour fully supports all efforts to end the convergence funding injustice and to give Scotland's farmers what is rightly theirs. We should remember that it was as a result of Scotland's low CAP support payment per hectare that the UK was awarded the convergence uplift in the first place. We urge the UK Government to set a date for the publication of the Bew review as a matter of urgency. The cabinet secretary will know that those who receive the lowest level of support are Scotland's hill farmers and crofters. Will he therefore ensure that the funds will be used for convergence, which would mean that hill farming and crofting are prioritised in any allocation of support in future?

Fergus Ewing: I genuinely welcome the support from Colin Smyth and the Labour Party. I hope and expect that there will be support from across the chamber. Let us be clear that if we argue among ourselves all the time, it is more difficult to achieve things for Scotland. What gets me up in the morning is doing good for Scotland and, in this case, righting a wrong that has existed for six long years.

Colin Smyth makes the good point that many of those who are in the greatest need are those who farm in our marginal uplands, our hill farms and our island areas. It is therefore right that they should benefit from the convergence moneys, if the promise is indeed implemented by the Prime Minister. We agree in principle that that is the case, but the member will forgive me if I want to see the colour of the money and have it in the bank account before we announce decisions on how to spend it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will move on to open questions. If we have succinct questions and answers, we should get through them all.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his continued pursuit of the convergence moneys. Will he explain a wee bit more about what the Bew review was set up to do? Will he join me in calling on the Secretary of State for Scotland to urge his Cabinet colleagues to right this wrong?

Fergus Ewing: The original terms of reference of the Bew review included looking at why the €223 million was not applied to Scottish farmers, as was intended by the EU. That was Michael Gove's intention, as discussed on 6 November 2017 and again in February 2018. However, the Treasury appears to have intervened and altered the terms of reference so that, instead of looking at what happened and why it happened—why UK Government ministers took the decision not to provide the money to Scottish farmers and what advice was given to UK ministers—the review's remit was solely to look at the next two years and the convergence moneys that are expected to be available for them. Although we welcome that limited remit, it does not implement the promise that Owen Paterson first made six years ago.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

In a rare moment of agreement with the cabinet secretary, I also think that the convergence moneys should have come to Scotland—and they will. Will the cabinet secretary guarantee that the farmers who were disadvantaged by that historical injustice will be top of the list when ensuring that the situation is righted?

Fergus Ewing: Again, I welcome that statement from Mr Mountain, and those from all members who are supporting this case so that it is followed through and payment made. I, too, hope and expect that payment will be made. It is a very serious situation and there is a real opportunity that I intend to make the most of.

In direct response to his question, I say yes, plainly, those who have been farming land that is of the low average yield per hectare should be entitled to benefit from the convergence money. A lot of solid work will need to be done to make sure that they are. As Mr Smyth said, they are among those who need help most. Just a couple of weeks ago, I met many of them at the Lochaber show with my colleague Kate Forbes, and they are having a tough time, as are farmers throughout the parts of Scotland where farming is a tough existence and job. Therefore, I am determined that they should benefit from the convergence money—once, of course, it is in our bank.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I welcome the comments from the Conservative members that indicate that the money should come to Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns that the decision-making power regarding how it may be distributed might be retained at Westminster? I say that in the light of remarks from the new Secretary of State for Scotland about the UK Government taking control of spending money in Scotland. Is that simply a new minister being naive, or is he being mendacious?

Fergus Ewing: I do not think that I am going to stray into talking about mendacity today, as you may be pleased to hear, Presiding Officer, but I have some concerns that there have been a number of suggestions—I will not go into them all, as there is not enough time—that there may still be some intention to attach strings to how the money should be deployed, should it be repatriated. That would be entirely wrong. It would be a breach of devolution and a predation of our powers, and we would not be willing to accept such conditions. However, I hope that reason will prevail and that that will not be the case. I hope that I have also clearly indicated that there is reasonable common ground about the main thrust of how the lion's share of the funding should be deployed.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, support efforts to get those convergence funds back to Scotland and the cabinet secretary's indication that the funds will be directed to those in the most disadvantaged areas. Would the CAP information technology system be able to distribute those funds, especially if they are to go to those most in need?

Fergus Ewing: I am confident that the CAP system and its operation would not be an obstacle to the distribution of funds. I should say that those are funds that were intended to have been distributed over the seven-year period between 2014 and 2020. It was not intended that the money be distributed from 2019 onwards. Therefore, we have to be careful in examining the strictures of the CAP system in terms of state aid—in particular, the *de minimis* rule—and in weighing that up.

Of course, the EU intended that those who most needed this money should get it, therefore I hope and am confident that we will be able find a way for that to happen.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I commend the cabinet secretary and his predecessors' efforts on the matter, and I roundly condemn the duplicitous UK Government for its treatment. The cabinet secretary talked in his statement and in a reply about doing good for those in need, and said that the money would be directed to agriculture. Is there an opportunity to do good and address need by directing some of the divergence money to the croft house grant scheme?

Fergus Ewing: The croft house grant scheme is pretty much separate from the convergence funding. I had not thought of that. I am happy to consider any suggestions that I get, including from Mr Finnie if he wants to write to me on the matter.

From memory, I would say that the croft house grant scheme has been extremely helpful in enabling us to help several hundred crofters throughout the mainland Highlands and particularly in the Western Isles, in Dr Alasdair Allan's constituency, and I have been a forthright advocate and a determined deliverer of funding to do just that.

It is an interesting point and I will consider it, but my first reaction is that that is not quite what the convergence money was intended for.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I agree that the funds should be due to Scottish farmers and crofters, but the varied statements of our Prime Minister on so many varied issues might not be so very sound. Having asked for Lord Bew's review, and the review having reached its conclusions, will the Scottish Government accept its findings when they are published and does the cabinet secretary expect the Prime Minister to accept them, too?

Fergus Ewing: I am hopeful that the findings will be admirable ones that we can support. I had the opportunity to give evidence to Lord Bew and I thought that the response that I had from him and his team was very positive. I got the impression that they understood the arguments and that,

perhaps, there was a tacit acceptance of the arguments, which are not very complicated.

I am hopeful about the results. I do not think that I could say in advance that we accept the conclusions of a report that has not yet been delivered, but I am hopeful that the Prime Minister, who has made one of the most unequivocal promises that I have ever seen in 20 years in politics, will make good on that promise. I hope and expect that that will happen, and sooner rather than later.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The issue of convergence funding is not made any easier or fairer as the prospect of a no-deal Brexit draws closer, with potentially disastrous consequences for sheep and beef producers in the Western Isles. Beyond the very welcome loan scheme that is now under way, what else can be done to provide some much-needed financial clarity for farmers and crofters as they make their plans for the future?

Fergus Ewing: The position is that, on the loan scheme in respect of the pillar 1 payments, we have issued 15,570 offers, which are worth €394 million. This is entirely separate from convergence. That represents 95 per cent of the eligible population. After the first week, over 7,500 loan offers have been returned. I urge all farmers and crofters in Dr Allan's constituency to return their offers as quickly as possible. If they do so, the intention—and my expectation—is that we will deliver payments of nearly €400 million, if everybody accepts their offers, within as early a period as possible, starting in the first week in October.

I praise the team of officials in the rural payments and inspections division that has been administering the scheme, which is very complicated. They have now done it for a few years. This is money that farmers and crofters will receive before Hallowe'en—before 31 October and the possibility of a no-deal Brexit—and it is money that will go into the rural economy to pay the bills of feed merchants, contractors and other parts of the supply chain in the agriculture sector. This is a very important piece of work, and it is probably the main practical thing that we are doing to prepare to mitigate as far as we can the consequences of a no-deal Brexit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the ministerial statement on the repatriation of convergence funds that are owed to Scottish farming. I apologise to Donald Cameron, David Torrance, Alex Rowley and Richard Lyle for being unable to take their questions.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Willie Coffey be appointed to replace Angela Constance on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee

Richard Lyle be appointed to replace John Mason on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Gordon MacDonald on the Education and Skills Committee

Angela Constance be appointed to replace Gail Ross on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Gordon MacDonald be appointed to replace Willie Coffey on the Finance and Constitution Committee

John Mason be appointed to replace Emma Harper on the Finance and Constitution Committee

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Angus MacDonald on the Public Petitions Committee

Emma Harper be appointed to replace Gail Ross on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Angus MacDonald be appointed to replace John Mason on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

John Mason be appointed to replace Willie Coffey as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee

John Mason be appointed to replace Angela Constance as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee.—[*Graeme Dey*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the two motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions, unless any member objects.

The question is, that motions S5M-18641 and S5M-18642, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Willie Coffey be appointed to replace Angela Constance on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee

Richard Lyle be appointed to replace John Mason on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Gordon MacDonald on the Education and Skills Committee

Angela Constance be appointed to replace Gail Ross on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Gordon MacDonald be appointed to replace Willie Coffey on the Finance and Constitution Committee

John Mason be appointed to replace Emma Harper on the Finance and Constitution Committee

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Angus MacDonald on the Public Petitions Committee

Emma Harper be appointed to replace Gail Ross on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Angus MacDonald be appointed to replace John Mason on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

John Mason be appointed to replace Willie Coffey as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee

John Mason be appointed to replace Angela Constance as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will take a few moments for members and the cabinet secretary to change seats.

Palestine

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-16637, in the name of Claudia Beamish, on "Towards an independent Palestinian state: a Scottish proposal". The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes calls for action towards an independent Palestinian state; recognises Britain's historical responsibilities in Palestine and Israel and notes the view that British engagement is needed for a better future; acknowledges Scotland's role in influencing Britain to act for true equality, promoting a policy based on those universal values that Britain helped enshrine in international law; commends the work of the Balfour Project in advancing the education of the British public in the history of Britain's involvement in the Middle East, and notes calls, including from people in the South Scotland region, for six measures to be taken, which are an end to the closure of Gaza, freedom of worship for all believers, respect for the rule of law, accountability, recognition of the State of Palestine alongside Israel and a UK Government commitment to defend the fundamental rights of both peoples.

17:02

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am saddened to have to bring my motion to the chamber this afternoon, but I am relieved to have the opportunity to debate the grave situation that has been created for the people of Palestine and commit to supporting a just way forward that benefits Palestinians and Israelis alike.

I thank my colleagues who signed the motion for debate. The motion recognises the historical responsibility of the United Kingdom in Palestine and Israel, and it acknowledges the fundamental role that Scotland, its people and its Government have and can play in promoting principles that are rooted in equality, justice and the rule of law.

To fully grasp the degree to which Britain was involved in the making—or, better said, the unmaking—of the Palestinian state, we must first remember the historical conditions that made it happen. The roots of the conflict date back to the late 19th century, when Palestine was still part of the Ottoman empire, and Jewish nationalism—political Zionism—developed in Europe, largely in response to the pogroms in the Russian empire. We should never forget either the centuries-long history of virulent antisemitism throughout Christian Europe.

In 1917, a statement from the UK Government, formally known as the Balfour declaration, which was driven largely by strategic wartime considerations, turned an aspiration of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine from an

idealistic and unrealistic vision into a possibility as Britain publicly pledged to establish a

"national home for the Jewish people"

in Palestine.

It is worth remembering that, at that time, there were 600,000 Arabs and only 55,000 Jews living there, most of whom were indigenous and religious, non-Zionist and Arabic speaking. In total, the Jewish community in Palestine owned less than 3 per cent of the land.

At the end of the first world war, Britain became the mandatory power in Palestine and deliberately ignored the clear wishes of the Arab majority, who sought self-rule, in accordance with Britain's responsibility to fulfil the "sacred trust" as specified in the League of Nations mandate.

In 1937, the British Government suggested partitioning Palestine but swiftly abandoned the idea as it was too problematic. By 1939, because of Hitler's persecution of the Jews, the Jewish population in Palestine had risen sharply to about 30 per cent, but they still owned only some 6 per cent of the land.

During the second world war, Jewish militias turned on the British, their former sponsors. Ultimately, in 1947, Britain, which was exhausted militarily and financially, surrendered to Zionist terror and handed the future of Palestine over to the United Nations. We abandoned Palestine, shabbily and shamefully. Zionist militias defeated the Arab armies, expelled most of the Palestinian population—Muslim and Christian—into the surrounding countries and established the state of Israel on 78 per cent of the Palestinian land area.

Sadly and shamefully, as we are all well aware, that still is—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I feel emotional about this.

If we had been able to find a solution then, we would not have had to wait 70 years. Surely, we must find one now. Past British responsibility, which still provokes present injustice, demands British involvement in working urgently for a safer and brighter future for all the people in Israel and Palestine.

Only by seeking and achieving equality of rights, peaceful coexistence between the citizens of Israel and Palestine and the right of self-determination equally exercised can there be lasting security. However, lasting security for one people does not come from suppressing the rights of the other.

To achieve those universal values that Britain helped to incorporate into international law, my motion calls for six measures to be taken, as proposed by the Balfour project. The first is an end to the closure of Gaza. I visited Gaza in 2011 with

my friend and colleague John Finnie, and what we witnessed then has tragically deteriorated further for those who are struggling to bring up children there.

The second measure is true freedom of worship for all believers—Jews, Muslims and Christians—at their holy sites. East Jerusalem is occupied Palestinian territory, just like the rest of the West Bank and Gaza. That is the Palestinian state of which I speak today.

The third measure is respect for the rule of law. The whole Israeli settler enterprise is illegal under the fourth Geneva convention. Furthermore, the International Court of Justice has issued an advisory opinion regarding the legality of the Israeli wall in the West Bank, concluding that the wall is contrary to international law.

The fourth measure is accountability and consequences for whoever is responsible for continuously breaking international law, without fear or favour.

The fifth is recognition by the United Kingdom Government, and other European states, of the state of Palestine alongside Israel. In order for that to happen, we need a Labour UK Government. I am sure that the Scottish Government is also working for that recognition.

The sixth measure is a UK Government commitment to defend the fundamental rights of both peoples. Free and legitimate movement of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank is just one of those basic rights. In the Balfour declaration, the British Government pledged to protect the rights of the existing Arab population. Alas, we have broken our promise.

The moment to show our support is now, in the direst of times, with the toxic mix of the Israeli Government's deeply concerning political and military activity and the profoundly detrimental Trump Administration. In two weeks, the people of Israel will vote in a general election. Prime Minister Netanyahu seeks the votes of Israeli settlers by promising to annex the illegal settlements. Such an illegal step poses an existential threat to the policy of two states and equal rights that has been advocated by the British Government and the European Union. Recognition of Palestine and of Palestinian rights is the right way to pre-empt or even prevent that very real threat.

We should make no mistake: annexation is actually a threat to the wellbeing of both peoples. If there are not to be two states, there will effectively be one state and one power. Tragically, that state will be an apartheid state.

I am an optimist. I still believe that there can be peaceful coexistence through mutual recognition and parallel self-determination, but history teaches

us that the conflict cannot be resolved by the two parties by themselves; the disparity in power between them is too great. That is why I say that what we do and say here matters. We can act or we can simply watch.

I say that we must act, together, for the good of all. Recognition of Palestine alongside Israel does not delegitimise Israel. It takes nothing away from Israel that belongs to Israel; rather, it serves to confirm Israel's borders and her security. It also serves to establish Palestine's borders and her security, and it affirms the equal rights of two peoples to statehood, each in their own country.

It is my belief—I hope that members will agree—that we must acknowledge the profound challenges ahead, and I ask that we reaffirm today the commitment of the Scottish Parliament to a just solution for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, acknowledging the work of the Balfour project and committing to working to make the six measures that I have highlighted a reality.

17:10

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I congratulate Claudia Beamish, my colleague on the cross-party group on Palestine, on securing the debate and on making such a wonderful, heartfelt speech. I also welcome the people in the public gallery and thank them for their support and the hard work that they have carried out on the Balfour Project, a meeting of which was held here, in Edinburgh. I believe that a book will be produced that will contain submissions to the project, including those from Claudia and me.

Claudia Beamish referred to the history of Palestine. Like many others, I have always been a great believer that we cannot look to our future if we do not know about our past. Claudia gave us a detailed description of the middle east and what has happened to the Palestinian people, so I will not dwell on that.

Having said that, it is important that we recognise a Palestinian state—the subject of the debate—because it was, after all, the British who were responsible for partition. I am proud that many of us in Scotland and throughout the UK support the recognition of a Palestinian state. Claudia Beamish mentioned the British mandate. We know that the Balfour declaration promised to establish in Palestine a national home for the Jewish people, essentially vowing to give away a country that was not theirs—or ours—to give away. We know what has happened since, and the situation has got worse.

As Claudia Beamish said, in 1947, the British Government announced that it would hand Palestine over to the United Nations. On 29 November 1947, the UN adopted resolution 181,

recommending the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, with special international status for the city of Jerusalem. We must remember that that was a UN statement, because we now have Trump and what I would describe as a toothless UN. Given the state of the West Bank, Gaza and the city of Jerusalem now, it is time to act. The 1947 proposals were unacceptable because they went against the principle of the right to self-determination and imposed unworkable conditions on the Palestinian people. Today, those conditions are still unworkable.

We need to know our past before we can go forward. Let us be clear: regardless of history, there is a way forward. The only way to achieve a lasting peace is to recognise a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one. That was not possible in 1947, but, for me and many others, it is the only viable option open to us now. It is the only viable option for the Palestinian people, particularly those who are imprisoned in Gaza—the largest open-air prison in the world. That is not justice and it is not right.

We, in the Parliament and in Scotland, cannot continue to bury our heads in the sand. It is time for us and the rest of the UK to join other UN member states in recognising a state of Palestine. It is time that the UK Government recognised the state of Palestine. If we, in this Parliament, recognise the state of Palestine, it will send a huge message not just to the UN but throughout the world.

From the time that Britain administered Palestine until it abandoned it, in 1948, our involvement in Palestine has been quite shameful. As I said, I think that the UN is a toothless tiger, but we support any UN efforts to bring about a two-state solution. We have talked about it enough: it is time for action. I fully support the motion and my colleagues who have supported it, and I support the six measures that are mentioned in the motion.

17:14

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Claudia Beamish for the debate. I have visited Israel and the West Bank twice, most recently in summer 2018 as part of the building bridges with Israel cross-party group trip that was organised for MSPs.

As colleagues have outlined, the Israel/Palestine issue has been a prominent conflict in the international arena for decades, including since 2005, when, despite Israeli disengagement from the Gaza strip, the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas won control of the strip and deposed the Palestinian Authority in a violent coup. That was further exacerbated by

Hamas's refusal to acknowledge calls by the US, the EU and the middle east quartet to recognise Israel, accept all previously signed agreements and give up arms. To this day, it insists on using terror against Israel to gain control over its entire territory.

Claudia Beamish: Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Bowman: I need to get on with making my points, thank you.

Six measures are mentioned in the motion, and I will attempt to touch on each of them.

The first is an end to the closure of Gaza. In 2005, Israel unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza strip and dismantled all its settlements there. That could have been a victory for the Palestinians; instead, in the following year, Hamas won control over the Gaza strip and deposed the Palestinian Authority in a coup. To this day, it insists on using terror against Israel to gain control over its entire territory—

Sandra White: Will the member give way?

Bill Bowman: Not at the moment, thanks. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sit down, please, Ms White. The member is not taking an intervention; there is no point in speaking.

Bill Bowman: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The second measure is true freedom of worship for all believers—Jewish, Muslim and Christian—at their holy sites in Jerusalem, which must be the shared capital of two states. Religious freedom and religious holidays are enshrined by constitutional legislation in Israel. Freedom of access and worship is ensured at all sites, and that is what I saw when I was there. Those facts are perhaps unsurprising, because Israel is consistently ranked as the freest country in the middle east. The facts stand in stark contrast to what happens in the West Bank and Gaza; when it comes to holy places, Jews have little to no access to religious sites in the West Bank.

Third is respect for the rule of law embodied in UN Security Council resolutions. Israel has accepted UN Security Council resolution 242 and made peace with both Egypt and Jordan based on it. In both instances, Israel returned land for peace and uprooted Israeli settlements. Israel has offered blueprints for a two-state solution between itself and the Palestinians but they were rejected by the Palestinians.

Fourth is accountability and serious consequences for breaking international law. The High Court of Justice of Israel is renowned worldwide for its judicial independence, and it has ruled many times against Israeli Government

decisions. In the meantime, Hamas violates international humanitarian law by targeting civilians with its missiles, using its own civilians, including children, as human shields and hiding its arsenals in heavily populated areas, including in schools.

Fifth is the UK Government's commitment to defend the fundamental rights of both peoples, including their right to security.

Claudia Beamish: Can I make a quick intervention on that point?

Bill Bowman: No—I just want to get my points made, thank you.

People who care about the fundamental rights of both peoples too often ignore the human rights violations of Palestinians by Palestinians. Despite being legally mandated, no national elections have taken place in the Palestinian territories since 2006. Mahmoud Abbas was elected President of the National Authority on 9 January 2005 for a four-year term that ended in 2009. The last elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council were held in January 2006. The Palestinian people are therefore prevented from choosing their representatives by their own leadership.

Finally, a key issue is that of recognition by the UK Government and European partners of the state of Palestine alongside Israel. Recognition of a Palestinian state without its having arisen from direct negotiations between the two parties would harm the peace process and drive the Palestinians away from the negotiating table. It would reward the Palestinians for their rejectionism and eliminate any incentives for them to compromise on key issues that are critical in the negotiations. Anyone who claims to support a two-state solution must support a return to direct negotiations, which are the only way to guarantee a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the region, which I am sure we all would like.

17:19

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The question of Palestine is the story of a people without a land—in fact, a people who were kicked out of their land in a very violent struggle. It is a simple story of colonial dispossession and ethnic cleansing.

Some people, such as Bill Bowman, do not want to recognise the recorded facts about the history of Palestine because they need and want to create a narrative to defend the Israel that they see. Clearly, Bill Bowman did not see any of the brutal elements of the occupation, which has now been going on for 53 years—the longest military occupation in history.

The world treats the issue as a multifaceted, complex story and demonises the struggle, as Bill Bowman has just done. People think that only Israel could possibly understand its complex story. Israel got 78 per cent of the former Palestine; the Palestinians were given 22 per cent, which has been occupied since 1967. The conflict is not about religion; it is about the Palestinian people's struggle for national identity. All they want to do is to achieve a sovereign independent state of their own, and it is our responsibility to champion that cause.

We are no further forward now than we were decades ago. There is no hope for Palestinians or for their future. Twenty years of peace talks have turned out to be a sham. It is interesting that Mr Bowman blames the Palestinian leadership. I met members of the Knesset when I was an observer in the election. Some of the members were good enough to admit that they deliberately humiliated Yasser Arafat, who had laid down arms in order to provide a peaceful solution for the Palestinians. The people—rightly or wrongly—voted for Hamas in 2006. It does not matter what the Palestinian leadership does; there is always a reason not to grant Palestinians their state.

The state that we talk about is a state of occupation. Day and daily, children are shot in the street for throwing stones. Interestingly, the Jewish leader Henry Siegman, who is the former head of the American Jewish Congress, said that Israel is preventing a Palestinian state from being created. He said:

“Millions of Palestinians live in a subservient position without rights and without security, without hope, and without a future.”

He said that Palestinians want only the same as what Israeli Jews want, as we would expect.

I am proud that Labour has said that, if it got into power, it would recognise Palestine as an independent sovereign state. I understand that that is also Scottish National Party policy. In fact, 138 countries have recognised Palestine as an independent sovereign state.

I want to talk about the action that has been taken against children during the occupation, including arrest and detention. Sandra White might remember that, when we were in Salwan many years ago, we met a three-year-old child who had been detained by the Israel Defense Forces for throwing stones. Children are interrogated and taken from their parents during the night. The parents are then presented with documentation in Hebrew that they cannot understand. Adolescents are locked in Israeli jails, but we do not know where they are and their families have not heard from them for 10 or 15 years. Is that the Israel that people want to defend? It is quite shocking that people do not at least recognise the brutality of the

occupation. Forty per cent of minors are arrested in the public sphere simply for throwing stones. Most notably, when she was 17, Ahed Tamimi was arrested for slapping a soldier and sentenced to 18 months in jail. We should remember that the soldier had killed her cousin in front of her very eyes.

Ambassador Husam Zomlot has sent a letter to all MSPs. He says that this is a crucial moment in the history of the Palestine-Israel conflict, not just for Palestinians but for Israelis, too. The incumbent Israeli Prime Minister is facing an election in which he is openly advocating against the two-state solution. The two-state solution is British foreign policy, Conservative policy, Labour policy and Liberal policy, and it was US policy until very recently.

As Claudia Beamish said, the UK has a unique and historic responsibility. The Balfour declaration was clear that, in the creation of the state of Israel, the rights of the indigenous population were to be protected. No such protection has happened in the past five decades. The only way to secure peace in the region is to recognise that Israel must be challenged to draw back from its illegal occupation, get round the table and create an independent Palestinian state. If we believe in any kind of fairness, that is what we will support.

17:24

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I congratulate my friend and colleague Claudia Beamish on making an excellent speech, as ever. One phrase that I noted from it was “a just way forward”. I really hope that we are all up for that. In his letter to all of us, Ambassador Zomlot talked about Palestinians living

“in peace, equality, freedom and with the ability to enjoy their basic right of self determination along with all other peoples in this world.”

That is not radical; it is mainstream thinking. There is nothing off the wall about that. It is the fundamental basis of liberal democracies, international law and basic humanitarian norms.

I understand why Mr Bowman did not want to accept interventions, but this is a debate—it is about discussing. I do not know the source of some of your information. We have spoken in countless debates and, if there is frustration in people’s voices, it is because we are frustrated. I am weary of saying the same things. I will condemn violence from any quarter. Are you prepared to condemn violence from any quarter, Mr Bowman? No, you are not. You are not nodding your head.

That is the problem. This is not a contest of equals, if that is how it is viewed. There is a heavily armed apartheid regime. In every term of

international law—I see Mr Mountain screwing his face up. That is exactly the same terminology that we applied to the oppressive regime in South Africa. Thank goodness we have progressed from there.

We progress only by having discussions. The peace that has come to the island of Ireland, which is presently under threat as a result of Mr Bowman’s Government, is—

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I take grave exception to anyone saying that anyone should promote or accept violence on any side. I accept the point that you made, Mr Finnie. First, both sides should disengage. They should stop fighting, firing bullets at each other, and killing each other. Once that happens, we can move forward. That is what happened in Northern Ireland. We will not go back to the problems in Northern Ireland unless politicians make that a likelihood, and I do not believe that any politician is trying to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I did not want to intervene in a quite rightly emotional debate, but the word “you” is being used frequently. I let it pass a few times, but please remember the protocols in Parliament.

John Finnie: Apologies, Presiding Officer. I also apologise to Mr Mountain.

The paramedics who are targeted and shot in protests do not shoot at anyone, and the photographic journalists who cover demonstrations—that is what they are, and people have a right to free assembly and to express opinions—pose a threat to no one.

I had a speech prepared, but I am running out of time. I wanted to say that the motion is well crafted. It lays out a number of things in a very balanced way. Britain has a historical responsibility, and it is very well placed to bring about engagement. That is not about selling arms, turning a blind eye to the latest atrocity or having no comment to make. It is very important that we promote the

“universal values that Britain helped enshrine”.

Britain helped to enshrine those values at the conclusion of the second world war so that there would be no repetition of enclosed enclaves with people under attack, as there is in the biggest prison in the world, which will, according to the UN, be uninhabitable in a year. Collective punishment is illegal, but that is what is happening.

We all need to engage, and it is important that we engage in the chamber, too, although members may feel that we have little influence. I know that the Scottish Government engages, and I commend its efforts and willingness to engage in

the matter and raise it internationally, which is very important.

Claudia Beamish and I saw children in Gaza. There is a traumatised community there. Day in, day out, adverse childhood experiences are talked about in the chamber. We talk about individuals in individual circumstances. An entire community there has had adverse experiences.

We must address the issue, and we will do so by talking. I hope that, when we speak about the issue next time, Mr Bowman will accept interventions, because we will progress matters by debate, not by ignoring each other.

17:29

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I, too, am grateful to Claudia Beamish for bringing such a well-crafted motion to Parliament this afternoon. It threads the needle to allow all sides of the chamber to support it, and the Liberal Democrats certainly do.

One of the darkest legacies of the British empire is the reality that, on maps around the world, lines that were drawn by British cartographers spark conflicts to this day. That carries with it a burden of atonement and redress that is handed down through the generations, and we as parliamentarians have a role to play in at least trying to unpick some of that mess. Nowhere is that cat's cradle greater than in the current state of affairs in Israel/Palestine. Three treaties, each born of motives of profit, conquest and military alliance in war time, have created that mess. Each of them has, in some way, created the state of affairs, and the state of conflict, that has existed in that region for the better part of a century.

The McMahon–Hussein agreement during world war one was brokered in part by T E Lawrence to bring Arabia into the war against the Ottoman empire, with the hint that it might have its own unified state of Arabia. The Sykes–Picot agreement took place at the end of the war, and saw the victors of that war carving up, for monetary gain, aspects of the middle east, drawing maps around oil wells and crashing peoples together to create states such as Iraq and Syria. Finally, as we have heard, the Balfour declaration of Lord Rothschild was designed first and foremost to help bring America into world war two with the promise of a Jewish homeland state.

Each of those treaties, seemingly vital to British interests at the time, effectively carved up the same piece of land and its peoples with no thought of the impact that it would have on those peoples or those lands for generation upon generation. That legacy is measured out in human lives—in the disproportionate violence and displacement that takes place to this very day. Between March

and November last year, Israelis launched intermittent air and artillery attacks on the Gaza strip, killing 37 Palestinians, while Palestinian groups fired more than 1,000 rockets into Israel during the same period.

I welcome today's motion and the questions that it asks about what we in Scotland can and must do. As Lib Dems, we strongly believe that those two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, are obliged to share the region forever. However, it is part and parcel of our historic responsibility to help them do that. We favour neither group over the other in that reality, and we look forward to recognising a wholly autonomous and sovereign Palestinian state, when that will lead to a workable and sustainable two-state solution. We condemn the disproportionate use of force on both sides, whether that is rocket attacks by Palestinians or the Israelis' continuing illegal policy of settlement expansion. The morass of Israel/Palestine, and all the suffering that goes with it, is the dark inheritance of our history, and we need to play a part in its future.

17:33

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): This should not be a debate of blame because we support a position or a state, but a debate of solutions. I thank Claudia Beamish for securing tonight's debate on Palestine. I listened intently to her Scottish plan, so I will cover some of the points.

I am again reminded that the Scottish Government supports a two-state solution, as do I. Two states, two Governments: Jews and Palestinians working together for peace in the region—peace that is long overdue. As deputy convener of the cross-party group on building bridges with Israel, I can say only that the CPG would be very happy to hold a joint meeting in Parliament with the CPG on Palestine to discuss solutions. I hope that Claudia Beamish and others accept my request.

John Finnie: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: Yes. I will—if I can get my time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was not a very polite request, but you will get your time back.

John Finnie: I am grateful to Mr Lyle for accepting my intervention. In the normal course of things, having said what I said about dialogue, I would say yes to his request. However, I wonder whether Mr Lyle would accept that some people who attend the cross-party group on Palestine would feel extremely uncomfortable—perhaps

even under threat by attending such a meeting, which is extremely unfortunate?

Richard Lyle: I am sure that I would not feel threatened in attending any cross-party group. We are saying that we need to find a solution. The point that I want to make tonight is that, in debating the issue, we must at least be able to talk to each other.

When I visited Israel and the West Bank, I could speak to anyone about the situation in the region. I spoke to ordinary Jews and Palestinians, all of whom said that they want to live in peace and co-operation. I saw that co-operation in the organisation that we visited, where the Jewish manager and Palestinian deputy worked together.

We also visited the Palestinian city of Rawabi, which is being built in the West Bank. That excellent project is being funded by Palestinians, and I wish them well.

As fellow members know, my questions are often direct. I had a meeting with a senior member of the Israeli Government. When I told him directly that I support a two-nation solution, his direct answer was, "So do we, Mr Lyle."

We also had the opportunity to visit Jerusalem, where I saw arrangements for different faiths to worship.

Claudia Beamish rose—

Richard Lyle: There should be true freedom of worship for all believers—Jewish, Muslim and Christians—at their holy sites.

Israel has accepted UN Security Council resolution 242 and made peace with Egypt and Jordan based on it. Israel has, in fact, offered blueprints for a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, including in the 2000 Camp David summit and at a 2007 conference.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: Recognising a Palestinian state without that arising from direct negotiations between the two parties will harm the peace process and drive the Palestinians away from the negotiating table.

Anyone who claims to support a two-state solution must support a return to direct negotiations. That is the only way to guarantee a peaceful, secure and prosperous future.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: No—I have something to say and I want to say it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down, Ms White.

Richard Lyle: In 1947, the British caused the problems through the partition plan, which was a recipe for disaster. Members need only go on to the internet to see that how they cut up Palestine was a recipe for disaster. My goodness!

So many plans have been rejected, including—I will rattle through them, Presiding Officer—the creation of a Palestinian state out of the Gaza strip, Saudi Arabia's 2002 peace plan, the Binyamin Elon plan, the proposed arc in which the West Bank would be joined with Gaza, the West Bank split, a secular Arab state as described in the Palestinian National Covenant, a federation of separate Jewish and Arab areas, and a united Arab kingdom plan.

Pauline McNeill: Rubbish!

Richard Lyle: It is not rubbish. It is true.

The problems in the region go back decades. Many people have tried to solve the problems, including numerous American presidents in many meetings at Camp David and on the White House lawn.

Claudia Beamish: You cannot say—

Richard Lyle: You do not want to listen. That is the problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down a moment, Mr Lyle. Members cannot conduct a debate by shouting across the chamber. Whether or not you are frustrated, that is not the way to conduct yourself.

Please conclude, Mr Lyle.

Richard Lyle: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I want a two-state solution. I will work with anyone, anywhere to afford peace to Palestinians and Jews in a region that deserves peace.

I thank Claudia Beamish for the opportunity to call for our cross-party groups to work together. Let us show what we can do to bring peace. If we cannot do that, we cannot do anything.

17:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the debate, which calls for action towards an independent Palestine, for freedom of belief for all people, for respect for human rights, for respect for the rule of law, for accountability and for recognition of the state of Palestine alongside Israel. I thank Claudia Beamish for lodging the motion and for putting the issue in its historic context. In my remarks, I will address in order the six issues that are mentioned in the motion.

On the closure of Gaza, the Scottish Government encourages the Israeli Government

and the Palestinian Authority to prioritise a sustainable solution for Gaza that includes practical steps to ensure the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza. The current situation, in which Palestinians are trapped in Gaza and in a cycle of violence, should not be allowed to continue. UN figures state that, in 2018, 260 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, with a further 65 having been killed so far this year.

The border of Gaza needs to be reopened. According to an Oxfam report last year, unemployment rates in Gaza were, at 42 per cent, among the highest in the world. Some 96 per cent of water there is undrinkable, and access to electricity and medicine is severely restricted. A tolerant world should not allow a situation like that to develop. The end of the blockade of Gaza needs to go hand in hand with cessation of violence. That includes violence by Hamas in Gaza, which needs to commit to an end to attacks. United Nations figures show that 14 Israelis were killed by Palestinians last year, with a further eight deaths this year. Violence on both sides must end.

On freedom of worship, the right to worship fully is a key human right, and peace in the middle east is dependent on communities being free to pursue their religious beliefs. Without religious tolerance, there can be no long-term peace. I include in that the practice of Christianity in Israel, which is a key issue that my constituents have raised with me. Peace in the region is possible only if everyone is treated equally, no matter their beliefs, their ethnicity or their gender.

Our aspiration is for Scotland to act as a good global citizen, drawing on our own experience at home to promote tolerance and respect for human rights in other countries. People of all faiths, and none, must be supported to follow their way of life without fear of discrimination.

On respect for the rule of law, I say that with rights come responsibilities. Peace and a tolerant society will exist only where the human rights of all are respected and there is respect for the rule of law. That must be at the heart of any solution, thereby ensuring that a just and lasting peace can be maintained.

On accountability, the rule of law can be respected only where there is accountability. Security forces and the police, the Government and its institutions must be held to account. With no accountability, there can be no real trust. Without trust, there can no real peace.

On recognition of the state of Palestine, the Scottish Government, in line with other Governments in Europe, supports a two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders. More than 130 countries around the world have already formally recognised the state of Palestine. On 15

May 2018, I wrote to the UK Government to encourage it to do so at the UN, but as we know, it has not yet done so. Officially recognising the state of Palestine would send a clear signal that the right of the people of Palestine to self-determination is recognised.

We firmly encourage Israel and Palestine to reach, under international law, a sustainable and—yes—negotiated settlement, which has as its foundation mutual recognition and the determination to co-exist peacefully. Despite considerable diplomatic efforts in the past, the two-state solution has practical barriers. The construction of illegal settlements continues to be tolerated and even encouraged by the Government of Israel. Continuing plans for new settlements in the West Bank and the retroactive approval of unauthorised settlements undermines stability and the viability of a two-state solution.

Official recognition would make clear the expectations on a responsible independent Palestinian nation state. Palestine should aspire to recognised standards in terms of respect for human rights, the integrity of its neighbours and the sanctity of the lives of their people. The people of Palestine should not allow their territories to be used by those who seek the destruction of Israel. The people of Israel deserve to live free from the scourges of terrorism and antisemitic incitement that gravely undermine the prospects for a two-state solution.

We believe that peace depends on there being two secure, stable and prosperous states—Israel and Palestine—living side by side. Accepting Palestine as a state in its own right alongside Israel should be the starting point of negotiations. Within Scotland, the Scottish Government does not tolerate violence or extremism in any form. Just as we condemn it when it is directed at any of our own communities, we condemn it in Israel and Palestine.

We believe that a lasting resolution that ends the settlement expansion and delivers peace for Israel and Palestine is long overdue. The UK needs to use its influence and to work with the international community and global institutions to secure a lasting peace in the region. That can be achieved only by taking a human rights-based approach, respecting the rights of all who live in the region and pushing for a two-state solution in which rights are respected.

We have consistently condemned obstacles to progress in the peace process, such as the indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel and the continued expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied territories. We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to use its influence to help to revitalise the peace process, to find a way to break

through the political deadlock and to bring an end to the conflict.

I commend the work of the Balfour Project to educate us all about the underlying causes of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The Scottish Government strongly encourages the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to work with the international community on securing long-term peace and ending the cycle of conflict that continues to affect Palestinians and Israelis. The Scottish Government supports the EU position of a two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders, and firmly encourages both Palestine and Israel to reach under international law a sustainable negotiated settlement that has, as its foundation, mutual recognition and the determination to co-exist peacefully.

We will continue to press the UK Government to do all that it can to work with international partners actively to secure peace in Israel and Palestine. A tolerant world can demand no less.

In this Parliament and in Scotland I want a tolerant debate, with understanding. We owe that to the people for whom we seek something similar, in terms of resolution. Perhaps we should start with ourselves, in this chamber.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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