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Official Report

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Wednesday 30 April 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business is portfolio questions. To get in as many people as possible, I would be grateful if we had short and succinct questions and answers.

NHS Scotland (Performance)

1. Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on how the performance of NHS Scotland compares with the national health service in other parts of the United Kingdom. (S4O-03146)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): In recent years, various organisations have published analysis of how the NHS performs in the four countries of the UK. That includes the recent work that the Nuffield Trust undertook and work in 2012 by the National Audit Office. Both those reports highlighted Scotland's strong performance in comparison with the rest of the UK on waiting times and highlighted that Scotland benefits from higher staffing levels.

The Office for National Statistics has previously compared hospital waiting times for specific procedures. We had that analysis updated and it was included in the Nuffield Trust report. It demonstrates that, for many procedures, such as hip and knee replacements and cataract surgery, average waiting times are shorter in Scotland than in both England and Wales.

Adam Ingram: Given the superior performance of NHS Scotland, will the minister outline the implications for future performance of a no vote in September's referendum?

Michael Matheson: The NHS in Scotland already operates independently. We can point to many successes in NHS Scotland under devolution. Devolution has provided us with the opportunity to develop policies that benefit the people of Scotland. For example, we have implemented free personal care for the elderly, free eye and dental health checks and free prescriptions, which are all major achievements under devolution. Scotland has taken a different path from that of the UK Government on the NHS. We have defended the NHS against the

privatisation that is happening south of the border and we have avoided multiple reorganisations, which has allowed us to focus on patient safety and the quality of care.

The Scottish Government's vision for the NHS is to maintain our publicly owned and publicly funded health service that is provided free at the point of delivery. A no vote would put at risk the ability to protect Scotland's NHS budget from cuts as a result of the privatisation agenda in NHS England and would reduce our ability to use the full range of levers to promote good health in Scotland.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Meanwhile, back in the real world, the Nuffield Trust's report highlights that Scotland is falling behind other nations of the UK on a number of fronts, although it is making welcome progress on others. One concern is that we are falling behind comparator regions of the UK, such as north-east England, on life expectancy and mortality. What action has the Government taken to improve the life expectancy of all Scots and especially those who may be dying far too young?

Michael Matheson: The member will know that life expectancy in Scotland is increasing, although not as fast as we would wish. He will understand that life expectancy is a complex issue that relates to health inequalities. To tackle the issue effectively, we must tackle the social inequality that shortens life expectancy in many deprived parts of Scotland. A key aspect is not only looking to the health service to deliver some of the answers but tackling social inequalities. To do that, we must have the full range of powers, which will allow us to undermine and address effectively the inequalities that have blighted Scottish society for far too long.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): Will the minister confirm that, as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has told me, the Scottish Government expects to receive £1.3 billion in consequential spending for the health service as a result not of cuts but of ring fencing and increased spending in the health service in England? Does the minister not think that that additional money has contributed to the considerable efforts that the Scottish Government has made to improve Scotland's health service?

Michael Matheson: The member will recognise that if there is a reduction in the health service budget in England as a result of its privatisation agenda, that will have a direct effect on our Barnett consequentials. It is interesting to note that neither the Labour Party nor the Tory party in London is committed to maintaining the Barnett formula. The consequences of that could be significant for the health service in Scotland, which is why we need to ensure that we protect the Barnett formula until Scotland becomes an

independent country and we manage our own health budget in a way that best suits our needs.

Multiple Sclerosis

2. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is raising awareness of multiple sclerosis. (S4O-03147)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Through the National Neurological Advisory Group, we are working closely with our stakeholders to ensure that people in Scotland living with all neurological conditions, including MS, have access to high-quality, person-centred, safe and effective healthcare services. I am pleased to advise that our third sector partners, including the MS Society, are an integral part of that group and will help to shape the priorities of the group's work plan for the coming year.

George Adam: As the minister will be aware, this is MS awareness week. This year's focus is on the right treatment at the right time, and on how we can make Scotland a leader in ensuring that everyone with MS can access the information, support and treatment that they need. Can he assure me that the Scottish Government will work with the MS Society and other partners to ensure that people with the condition get the right treatment at the right time?

Michael Matheson: Ministers expect national health service boards to have robust processes in place to ensure the provision of safe, effective, person-centred, high-quality patient care, which should be delivered by the right professional at the right time for patients, when they require it. The Scottish Government is fully committed to working with its stakeholders. We know that people who have conditions such as MS value the support that is provided by the MS Society. As I mentioned, the MS Society is an integral part of the National Neurological Advisory Group, which oversees the work nationally to progress neurological services.

I can also advise the member that officials recently met the MS Society to discuss the key themes of the treat me right campaign. Along with the national advisory group, officials will explore ways in which we can support the needs of people with MS in accessing information, support and treatment. We recognise the lessons that we can apply in supporting people with MS and ensuring that they get the right type of treatment and support at the right time.

Audiology (Waiting Times)

3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in reducing the time it takes for people to see a hearing specialist. (S4O-03148)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The way in which audiology services are provided has continued to evolve in recent years, with many boards now offering a one-stop clinic service. That means that some patients receive their consultation and, where appropriate, start treatment or are fitted with a hearing aid in one visit.

Progress is monitored regularly against the treatment time standards set as part of the delivery of the 18-week referral-to-treatment target. In February, the latest figures were published for all specialties for December 2013. They showed that 90.8 per cent of patients in NHS Scotland received their treatment within the current national standard of 18 weeks. The compliance rate is 90 per cent.

Liz Smith: The figures that the minister has just mentioned, which appeared in February, point to the fact that there is considerable inconsistency in how the statistics per region are calculated. Does he plan to address that? Will he ensure that audiology departments in every health board address the issue of how quickly we can get the basic equipment to people with hearing difficulties, which would include training people in the third sector to help?

Michael Matheson: If the member has specific examples of where she feels that there is inconsistency in how the data is being collected, if she passes that information to me I would be more than happy to look at it. We expect consistency of approach across all our boards in Scotland so that we can measure their performance against the RTT.

It must be said that there has been a significant improvement in how audiology services have been delivered in the past four to five years, because of our national strategy, which has resulted in the redesign of services. I am not sure whether the member participated in yesterday evening's debate in the chamber, but in that debate we heard examples of partnerships that have been forged between NHS boards, local authorities and the third sector to deliver audiology services that can be delivered by third sector organisations, such as the replacement of small bits of equipment, tubes and so on.

Only last week, I launched our new sensory impairment strategy, see hear, which is the first sensory impairment strategy of its type in the United Kingdom and brings together visual impairment and hearing impairment services to ensure that they are much more effectively aligned and patient focused. A key part of the work that we expect to take forward as part of the strategy will be to ensure that we have good co-ordination between the statutory sector and the third sector with regard to how the services are delivered.

Tamiflu

4. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to new research that shows there to be “no good evidence” that the Tamiflu vaccine reduces flu-related hospital admissions or the complications of influenza. (S4O-03149)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Tamiflu is not a vaccine. It is an antiviral medicine for the treatment and post-exposure prevention of influenza. We will consider all new relevant scientific evidence. That will include the Cochrane collaboration reviews that were published on 9 April, which considered data from the initial trials of Tamiflu and another antiviral medicine, Relenza, dating back to the late 1990s. It will also include evidence from other studies that have been carried out since the medicines were licensed, which support the view that we can help to ensure that we are providing the right approach in this area of policy and that we are using antiviral medication that can help to reduce the risks to individuals.

Murdo Fraser: How much money was spent by the Scottish Government on stockpiling Tamiflu? If, as the minister seems to be indicating, there is to be a review of the future use of the drug, can he tell us when details of that review will be made available to the public?

Michael Matheson: I can inform the member that we intend to work with other nations in the United Kingdom to review the stockpiling of the antiviral medications Tamiflu and Relenza, in order to evaluate whether that is the most appropriate approach to take in the future.

It is worth bearing in mind that the approach that we have taken in Scotland is consistent with the guidance that was issued by the World Health Organization and the approach that has been taken by other European and north American countries around stockpiling for a pandemic flu. It dates back to the approach that was set out in 2005 on the state of preparedness that the country should be in given the potential for a pandemic flu—at that time, the concern was bird flu.

The review will be carried out over the coming months and we expect it to report by the end of this year. We wish it to report on that timescale because there are some elements of the antiviral stockpile that are due for replacement next year and it would be helpful, from our perspective, for the review to be completed by that point, in order to inform that process.

On the member’s second point, we stockpile a level of antiviral medicines that is sufficient to cover 50 per cent of the population. Some 35 per cent of that is Tamiflu and 15 per cent is Relenza. The total market cost of stockpiling Tamiflu is

£21.1 million. The cost of stockpiling Relenza is £12.9 million.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Lab): I welcome the minister’s considered reply in view of the fact that I recommended to the Health and Sport Committee that it should recommend to the Government the stockpiling of Tamiflu, a position for which, at the time, the evidence was strong. Will the minister now get his Government to throw its weight behind the campaign to require the pharmaceutical industry to publish all its research prior to licensing? Hitherto in this case, partial research was published, which led to Tamiflu being thought to be of huge value.

Michael Matheson: I fully agree with the member that it is in the interests of the pharmaceutical industry to be extremely open and transparent about the evidence that it has at the time that it seeks a licence for any type of vaccination or medication. I would be more than happy to offer my support to the member’s call for the pharmaceutical industry to be as transparent as it is possible for it to be.

It is worth keeping in mind that some elements of research were not included in the Cochrane collaboration reviews, particularly observational studies that were undertaken and which will also have to form part of the review that will take place this year. The process gives us an opportunity to take time out to evaluate the types of medication that we are stockpiling in order to assess whether we are doing so in the most effective way and, if we are not, what other options might be available to us, and to consider how we can take that forward in the years to come.

Defibrillators in Public Places

5. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to increase the number of automated external defibrillators in public places. (S4O-03150)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Substantial investment in heart disease services has reduced Scotland’s premature death rate from coronary heart disease by more than 40 per cent in the past 10 years. In February 2014, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing announced £100,000 for public access defibrillators throughout Scotland to support the Scottish Ambulance Service’s community resilience strategy. In March, I announced a further £1 million for the installation of defibrillators in national health service dental practices. Together, those investments represent an important contribution to our goal of reducing the number of out-of-hospital cardiac deaths.

Angus MacDonald: I welcome the progress that the minister has outlined. Public access defibrillators make a positive contribution to safer and sustainable communities around the country. I have also been made aware of the community initiatives in a neighbouring constituency—in fact, my colleague Bruce Crawford's constituency—where telephone kiosks have been used to host AEDs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should come to the question, please.

Angus MacDonald: Will the Scottish Government continue to work with third sector, private partners and community groups to ensure that AEDs are ultimately available in every public place where people gather?

Michael Matheson: I have no doubt that members around the chamber have come across AEDs in a variety of locations throughout the country. I was surprised to come across one recently at the cash machine in Portree in Skye, which is also part of the national network that is being rolled out across the country.

The Government recognises the value of AEDs. That is why we made the recent funding announcements to support the roll-out across the country. We will work with third sector organisations, which have been active on the matter, to ensure that we have a co-ordinated approach to the policy. It is important that, once an AED has been installed at a particular location, the Scottish Ambulance Service is aware of its location so that it can direct patients or individuals to a particular unit at a given time.

I am more than happy to assure the member that we will continue to work with the Scottish Ambulance Service and the third and private sectors to ensure that we get a proper network of AEDs across Scotland's communities.

Dialysis Services (Accessibility)

6. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that dialysis services are accessible. (S4O-03151)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all people in Scotland who live with long-term conditions are able to access the best possible care and support. Our quality strategy sets out our vision for healthcare services that are safe, effective and person centred.

We provide policies, frameworks and resources to national health service boards so that they can deliver services that meet the needs of their local populations. Within that context, the delivery of

local services, including the provision of dialysis treatment, is the responsibility of individual NHS boards, which take decisions based on local priorities as well as evidence-based national clinical guidelines.

Jamie McGrigor: For many years, there has been a national target that NHS boards should provide hospital dialysis within 30 minutes' travelling time of all patients' homes where possible. However, a number of kidney dialysis patients in the Campbeltown area have to travel three times a week to the Vale of Leven hospital for treatment—a round trip of more than 230 miles each time, which takes two hours and 40 minutes each way. What can the minister do to help to reduce those lengthy travelling times? Does he agree with my constituents that a satellite dialysis unit in Argyll and Bute—either in Campbeltown hospital itself or at the Lochgilphead hospital in mid Argyll—would be a significant improvement?

Michael Matheson: I appreciate the concerns about the length of time and the energy that are involved in travelling to get access to dialysis that Jamie McGrigor has raised on behalf of his constituents, particularly those who stay in remote and rural areas.

The target is national, but there are specific difficulties in rural areas in being able to achieve it and in ensuring that services can be delivered safely and effectively for the patients who require access to them.

I understand that NHS Highland recognises the particular problems that some patients are experiencing, and I have been in dialogue with the health board directly to see if there are any measures that it can take to address some of the disproportionate travel times and costs that are involved.

I also understand that NHS Highland has undertaken to consider again the case for a low-maintenance dialysis unit in Argyll and Bute in 2015-16. I am keen to see that proceed as quickly as possible. If there is an opportunity for a satellite dialysis unit to be provided safely, effectively and appropriately for the patients of that area, I expect the NHS board to consider pursuing that opportunity once it has undertaken its review work in the area.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Dentistry)

7. Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing last met representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to discuss dentistry. (S4O-03152)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Ministers and Government officials regularly meet national health service boards,

including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to discuss health matters, including dentistry.

Hanzala Malik: I am concerned about a number of gravely ill and vulnerable people who have been forced to wait months for approval for dental treatment. A seriously concerned constituent informed me about an elderly lady with dementia who required a home visit to get new dentures but who had to wait nearly two months for approval, during which time she was unable to eat. In another case, the dentist of a cancer patient who lost 5 stone and whose dentures no longer fitted decided to cover the cost of the dentures himself rather than wait for permission.

What is the minister doing to ensure that people who are seriously unwell or vulnerable and who require home dental visits receive them and that patients are not being unnecessarily traumatised? Will the minister consider fast-tracking such patients who are seriously ill—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think we have got the point.

Michael Matheson: I recognise the concern that the member has raised. I would be concerned if individuals were waiting for unacceptably long periods of time for the practitioner services division to approve particular forms of treatment.

Of course, there can be a number of reasons for a delay in approval, such as insufficient information being submitted. However, if there is no such reason, I expect the practitioner services division to respond to requests timeously. I also expect priority to be given to individuals who have an urgent need for treatment to be agreed.

If the member wishes to furnish me with specific examples, I am more than happy to make sure that the practitioner services division looks into them and provides an explanation for any delay. I am also happy to give him an assurance that I will ask my officials to make sure that the practitioner services division prioritises high-priority cases and has a robust mechanism in place to allow that to happen. If he gives me specific examples, I am more than happy to make sure that they are investigated thoroughly and that he gets a response.

Life Expectancy (Glasgow)

8. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address low life-expectancy rates in Glasgow. (S4O-03153)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Government is pursuing evidence-based health improvement measures on the ground. Last year, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde received £30 million of prevention funding to

tackle problems involving alcohol, diet, smoking and drugs, for example. We have also made a commitment to take legislative action on plain packaging and minimum pricing, and we have an ambitious physical activity programme to create a lasting legacy from the Commonwealth games.

However, as stated in the recent report of the ministerial task force on health inequalities, the problem cannot be solved with health solutions alone, as other factors, such as entrenched problems of social inequality and poverty, also play a significant role, particularly in health inequalities. We are therefore taking the fight beyond the NHS, with our early years collaborative and the launching of a child poverty strategy to tackle the root causes of poverty, and we are working closely to drive forward improvements in eight transformational regeneration areas in Glasgow.

Patricia Ferguson: As the minister is aware, life expectancy for men in Glasgow is about 7.5 years less than for those in East Dunbartonshire, whereas for women there is a difference of some 4.9 years. Those are average figures; for some areas of Glasgow, the gap would be even greater. Can the minister advise what additional help will be given to general practitioners who work in the so-called deep-end practices to ensure that they have the resources to allow them to tackle the elements of this complex issue that are within their remit?

Michael Matheson: Patricia Ferguson raised the deep-end practices, which are a very good initiative, and the way that they are assisted for the type of demand that they are experiencing. I have met some of the deep-end practice GPs, who are extremely committed to the agenda of tackling inequality in their communities and to using their resources effectively to do that.

We are considering how we can add to their role and augment their staffing levels in order to support the work that they undertake in their more deprived communities. It is a model that can lend itself to helping to undo what are very often intergenerational problems. The additional resource needs to be able to make a real difference on the ground to how those GPs can support individuals more effectively, in order to break the link between what are very often ingrained health and social problems that blight lives and lead to much shorter life expectancy. It is unacceptable that we should tolerate those problems in our society, and we should use every possible lever that we have to break that link, where we can.

NHS Lothian (Meetings)

9. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met

representatives of the NHS Lothian board. (S4O-03154)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Ministers and senior officials meet regularly with the board of NHS Lothian to discuss issues of interest to the people of Lothian.

Sarah Boyack: I very much welcome the fact that reports are being prepared in the light of shocking revelations about general practitioner surgeries being open but full, with patients waiting weeks for an appointment. However, given the importance of swift access to GPs for early diagnosis, which is crucial for so many conditions, the huge pressure that is now on GP services, the time lag for training new GPs and the investment in premises that NHS Lothian, doctors and patients' groups believe we urgently need, will urgent financial support be made available to increase the supply of GP services?

Michael Matheson: As Sarah Boyack will be aware, we have been taking forward a range of measures through national policy to model our services in a way that will allow us to shift the balance from the acute sector to the primary care sector, to support individuals more effectively in their own communities and homes. GP services are an important part of that.

It is important that our health boards, including NHS Lothian, have the right type of provision in place in order to meet the needs of their communities. We have increased funding to NHS Lothian and it has had an NHS Scotland resource allocation committee uplift to help it meet the demands that it faces. We expect the board to utilise its resources in a way that allows it to meet those growing demands.

It is also extremely important that services are planned in a way that means that the health service does not operate on its own but works in partnership with the local authority on how it delivers services. I am very much of the view that a key part of the way that primary care services can be planned more effectively is through better joint planning between local authorities and our health services, which should use their resources collectively to meet communities' needs.

I assure Sarah Boyack that we recognise the importance of primary care. The resources that boards have been given are there to ensure that they plan effectively to meet their communities' needs. It is important that our local authorities and health boards work together to maximise the resources in their communities to ensure that primary care can be delivered in the most effective way.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Is the minister aware that the population of Lothian is expanding more quickly

than that of any other part of Scotland and that Lothian still has a long way to go before it receives the NRAC share to which it is entitled? Given the intense pressure on GP services—on which I am regularly contacted in my constituency—will he at least look at providing additional funding, specifically for primary care services, which I know that in principle he wishes to expand?

Michael Matheson: It is important that NHS Lothian uses the resources that it already has most effectively to meet the growing demand that it faces.

Mr Chisholm says that we are still some way away from achieving a position through the NRAC formula but, by 2016-17, we expect none of our boards to be more than 1 per cent below funding parity, because we have been accelerating that process. That has resulted in additional funding for NHS Lothian. For example, NHS Lothian received an NRAC parity adjustment of £12.275 million in 2012-13 and a further NRAC parity adjustment of £17.521 million in 2013-14. We have been accelerating that process to ensure that the boards that are looking for parity receive it as quickly as possible. By 2016-17, the difference should be below the 1 per cent figure that I mentioned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 10, in the name of Ken Macintosh, has not been lodged. A less than satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Residential Care

11. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the "Full Report on the Future of Residential Care for Older People in Scotland". (S4O-03156)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government welcomes the constructive joint working between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities through the high-level task force on residential care for older people. The recommendations in the report will play a vital role in our work with our partners to develop the Scottish residential care sector in the future.

Roderick Campbell: The report calls for further work to be undertaken

"to examine how much additional funding would be required to bring care workers' pay up to the 'living wage' standard."

Will the Scottish Government commit to investigating that, given the absolute importance of carers, the need to reduce staff turnover and the benefits of a career structure for carers?

Michael Matheson: The Scottish Government has led the way in implementing the living wage

for all staff who are covered by its pay policy and all staff in the national health service in Scotland, and we are working to encourage all other employers to pay the living wage. The Scottish Government has introduced the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, which includes provision for statutory guidance to ensure that, wherever relevant, workforce matters, including pay and benefits, are fully evaluated as part of the public procurement process.

It is extremely important that we ensure that staff who work in the care sector are provided with the right pay for the important work that they undertake. We absolutely recognise the importance of carers and we are already working with partners to address some of the issues that are highlighted in the report, including the issue of the living wage being made available to those in the social care sector.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The report states that

“there is insufficient funding for investment in the care home sector”

and that publicly funded residents are generally being cross-subsidised by self-funding residents, with

“many providers relying on expensive and ... complex debt packages to stay viable.”

What is the Government doing on those two issues?

Michael Matheson: The member might be aware that, for many years, there has been a marked difference between what a self-funder pays and the funding for someone who is paid for by the local authority. That historical anomaly has long been in the system, and it is highlighted in the report.

In relation to the points that the member raises, she will be aware that the report highlights the need for greater transparency in how care costs are calculated so that people can see that clearly and can consider how to achieve greater consistency in those costs. Given the amount of detail in the report, we will work with COSLA and other partners such as the care sector in Scotland to consider how we can take forward the recommendations to get greater transparency on the issues that the member has highlighted, with the aim of ensuring that there are no hidden costs and that we do not get into a situation in which there is a perception of cross-subsidy taking place between one resident and another.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Given that the report calls for the living wage for all those who are employed in the care sector and that the European Union has confirmed that there is no barrier in European law to prevent the

Scottish Government from implementing a living wage, will the Government now back Labour's proposals for the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill and ensure that a living wage is paid in relation to all public service contracts?

Michael Matheson: Rhoda Grant should be in no doubt about the Government's commitment to the living wage, which we—unlike the previous Labour Government at Westminster—have proven through the measures that we have taken.

The detailed recommendations in the report require not just a quick reaction or response; they concern complex issues that we must work through to ensure that our care sector—and the care home sector in particular—is fit for purpose and that we have in place the right level of support for future years. We will work with our colleagues in local government and in the independent and third sectors to ensure that we progress the recommendations in a measured way so that we have a sustainable social care sector in the future.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Remote Communities)

12. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the Scottish Ambulance Service to discuss crewing in remote communities. (S4O-03157)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the Scottish Ambulance Service on a range of issues, including the mix of skills that ambulance crews require to support the delivery of high-quality patient care throughout Scotland, both at present and as we strive to deliver the 2020 vision for healthcare.

Rob Gibson: The minister will be aware of the positive contribution that ambulance service personnel can make when they are recruited from and living in small communities, where a full roster can avoid single crewing and the consequent delays for patients. Will he ensure that Kinlochbervie gets a full-time ambulance team? The nearest neighbouring community of Lochinver, which has a similar geography and population, already has one.

Michael Matheson: Rob Gibson will be aware that there are at times challenges in ensuring that we have the right ambulance service cover in all rural areas. He highlights the particular issue that Kinlochbervie is presently experiencing, and I expect the Scottish Ambulance Service to try to ensure that it has the right crewing levels in the local area to meet local need.

It is extremely important to ensure that there is the right training for the staff who are crewing those particular ambulances, because they will

often have to travel considerable distances with individuals before they are able to get medical cover.

I am happy to assure Rob Gibson that I will ask the chief executive of the Scottish Ambulance Service to look into the issues that he raises and to consider what can be done to address the concerns of the residents of Kinlochbervie in the member's constituency about the way in which the Scottish Ambulance Service operates in their community.

National Health Service Pharmaceutical Services

13. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish the findings of its consultation on the control of entry arrangements and dispensing general practitioner practices. (S4O-03158)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The independent analysis of the consultation responses is now complete and a report has been submitted to the Scottish Government. It has highlighted complex and competing views, and issues have been expressed across the range of respondents that are extremely helpful in informing how we move forward.

We will announce very shortly how we intend to take forward an amended framework for control of entry that we believe will best meet the service needs of communities throughout Scotland. It will build on the themes, and the responses to those themes, that were tested in the consultation exercise.

Bruce Crawford: Is the minister aware that in my constituency of Stirling, applications to open new pharmacies were recently approved for Drymen and Aberfoyle by the pharmacy practices committee for Forth Valley? There is no doubt that, in both those areas, the services that local GP practices provide will suffer.

The approval that was given on 20 March for a pharmacy in Aberfoyle was greeted by shock and anger by me and my constituents, given that application's significant weaknesses. It is now potentially the subject of an appeal.

Given that situation, can the minister be much more precise on exactly when the Scottish Government will introduce the necessary changes to the regulations? How long does he estimate that it will be before amended regulations will be enacted?

Michael Matheson: I am sure that Bruce Crawford recognises that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the individual cases, given that they are going to appeal.

However, I acknowledge the concerns that he has expressed, and I am aware of similar concerns that his constituents have raised in correspondence directly with the Scottish Government.

I assure the member that GP practices that are affected by the opening of a community pharmacy in their area remain eligible for funding for the primary medical services that they are contracted to provide. I would expect national health service boards—in this instance, NHS Forth Valley—to work constructively with those GP practices and their patients to continue to meet their reasonable needs.

Key aspects of the control of entry framework will, as we move forward, be underpinned by amended regulations, which we aim to lay before Parliament—and which should come into force—before summer recess this year.

Scotland's Future

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09844, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on Scotland's future. I call Ms Goldie to speak to and move the motion.

14:40

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): On behalf of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, I am delighted to open this debate on Scotland's future and her continued place within the United Kingdom. I will proudly and passionately proclaim the merits, opportunities and advantages that the unique partnership of the United Kingdom offers to the family of nations in it: Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is a vibrant, dynamic and vivid example of how being together and working together, with all our national diversity, creates a richly interwoven United Kingdom that is greater than the sum of its parts.

This enduring, extraordinary, political, social and economic union enjoys support internationally and across different political parties. I know that Labour and the Liberal Democrats value that union as passionately as I do, and I look forward to their contributions to the debate. The union is also supported by people with no political views. Opinion polls consistently confirm that, across Scotland, the majority of people support and want to stay in the United Kingdom. The interesting question to pose is: why? Why, in 2014, is there such broad support for a structure that was conceived more than 300 years ago?

To answer that question, we need first to look at the what—what is this partnership and what does it enable Scotland to do? Like any partnership, it offers twin attractions. It lets us share talent, pool resource and maximise opportunity. In times of challenge, it spreads the burden of risk. Together, we were able to fight against and defeat Nazism. Together, we have fought against and continue to fight against terrorism. Together, we have faced the searing challenge of global recession and bank failures. It is worth remembering that the UK Treasury had to find nearly £50 billion to bail out the banks, including the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Bank of Scotland. It also had to provide guarantee measures equating to nearly £275 billion for the Royal Bank of Scotland alone. That is not being negative—that was a godsend.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):

Does the member acknowledge that the United States Government also contributed to the bail-out of the Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of

Scotland in 2008 to the tune of \$180 billion and \$230 billion respectively?

Annabel Goldie: I am merely indicating the extent of Treasury support and pointing out that that is an important dimension of economic stability in the union that is the United Kingdom.

In the global world in which we live—a world that is only as distant as one's mobile phone, iPad or tablet—being able to influence and have clout matters. We need not to exercise some ancient imperial colonial control, but to be at the heart of international influence, policy direction and decision making. We must promote international security, global peace, protection of democratic freedoms and protection of the planet, and we must find trading partners to secure investment to support business and to create jobs. Our United Kingdom partnership lets us, in Scotland, do all that. We are in the G7 and G8 and we are one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. We are also a lead member of NATO and one of the top three countries in the European Union, along with France and Germany.

In this global age we need that global reach, and as part of the UK we have it. A separate Scotland could not replicate that. The UK employs 14,000 people in 267 embassies, high commissions, consulates and other offices in 154 countries and 12 overseas territories around the world. We can hardly move abroad without the reassuring sign of the union jack. [*Laughter.*] That derisive laughter is a sad reflection of the lack of gravity with which the debate is being treated.

The UK is defending Scotch whisky internationally against counterfeits, discriminatory or excessive taxation, trade barriers and other restrictions. Scottish businesses benefit from the active support of UK Trade and Investment, which has 169 offices in more than 100 countries. Last year alone, UK Trade and Investment helped nearly 2,000 Scottish businesses trade with other countries, so, in a global world, we are plugged in where it matters. A separate Scotland, however well-intentioned, cannot create that scale of diplomatic presence.

It is important that, in a global world, we also deliver to those less fortunate than we are. Last year, the UK gave more than £11.4 billion in international development spending—it was the world's second largest overseas development donor. Impressively, the Westminster Government has increased international development spending to 0.7 per cent of gross national income, making the UK the first G8 country to meet that target. Again, with the best will in the world, a separate Scotland cannot match that level of contribution. In a global world, I want to be part of that United Kingdom presence and influence. It is immensely positive and very important. It is something to

celebrate and be proud of and in a separate Scotland I would not have that. I, for one, am not jacking in the union jack.

I have never regarded myself as being in the van of youthful opinion—at least, not for a very long time. However, like many of my colleagues in this Parliament, I have been visiting schools and taking part in debates and the evidence that is coming through is that, overwhelmingly, young people in Scottish schools and universities support the United Kingdom. Why is that? To them, the UK partnership is positive, it is relevant to Scotland and, in their world—the global world—it is a partnership with huge international significance.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annabel Goldie: I will just finish this point.

With a population of 5 million people, we are simply not going to be at the international top tables. Not only would Scotland lose out on that influence, but others would make those strategic global decisions.

John Mason: I thank the member for giving way. The member mentions young people's opinions. Does she also accept that young people are very enthusiastic about being in the EU and that being in the EU is a key way forward for Scotland and for the UK?

Annabel Goldie: I am sure that young people are very enthusiastic about a range of issues, Mr Mason, and at the moment we are in the EU so they can be in the EU if they so desire. *[Interruption.]*

I did not, from the age of 11, grow up beside an ordnance factory and attend Greenock academy, watching a regular presence of naval activity on the Clyde, without being acutely conscious of the significance of defence.

Defence is inevitably linked to the global world that I have just described. The UK is a major presence in NATO. The UK has one of the most professional armed forces in the world, with a global reach.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I am grateful to Miss Goldie for giving way. She said that she grew up in the west of Scotland. When will she refer to the enduring intergenerational poverty that the UK has presided over in her backyard in the west of Scotland? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabel Goldie: In fact, in the west of Scotland, I have been fortunate to see a very impressive economic transformation from industrial and traditional industries to the high-tech

industries that arrived in Inverclyde at the end of the 20th century.

Scottish regiments are an integrated part of the British armed forces and, at a time when the size of the UK army is decreasing, army numbers in Scotland will increase by roughly 800 people. Overall, military personnel numbers in Scotland will increase to more than 12,500, which is the highest level since 2007.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annabel Goldie: I want to make progress—I have been generous with interventions.

On procurement, defence for Scotland means thousands of defence jobs—jobs that are generally well-paid, skilled positions, which are provided by a range of companies from naval shipbuilders to specialised companies that are expert in modern equipment technology.

I will anticipate interventions and talk about Trident. Nuclear weaponry is a hugely emotive and divisive issue and I understand that. I find nuclear weaponry to be a very frightening capacity and I want a world in which such a lethal instrument of destruction is redundant. *[Interruption.]* However, I believe that influence on the global stage is how to achieve that and non-proliferation treaties are hugely important as part of that objective.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member give way?

Annabel Goldie: No.

The major international powers, of which the UK is one, have a capacity to drive forward that agenda. I am clear beyond doubt that we can achieve that objective from a position of strength by negotiating multilateral nuclear disarmament. We will not influence it from a position of weakness with a unilateral approach.

Removing Trident from the Clyde, while being indifferent to where it would end up, would do absolutely nothing to influence nuclear disarmament worldwide. For the moment, the UK's Trident base at Faslane supports 6,500 jobs. That will rise to 8,200 by 2022. In addition, of course, the Dunbartonshire economy is underpinned by that presence.

The UK's strategic defence capability supports our global influence, enhances our national security and provides thousands of Scottish jobs. A separate Scotland with one naval base, one air force base and one all arms brigade would have a fraction of the current UK capability and would have no capacity to influence global activity or to be a leading presence in multilateral nuclear disarmament discussions. I want us to have a

strategic defence capability that can deliver on global influence, meaningfully enhance our national security and support thousands of Scottish jobs. I can get that only through our being in the UK.

On the domestic front, this United Kingdom partnership is multifaceted. It provides important benefits to the 60 million residents from our family of nations. Given that 800,000 Scots live elsewhere in the UK, the Scottish threads are a rich part of that tapestry. Those people still feel proudly Scottish, but they also feel themselves to be unquestioned members of that bigger family of nations.

That family allows freedom of movement for all its members, regardless of where in the UK they stay, not just because there are no border checks, but because there is a universal approach. There is a universal state pension, a universal welfare framework and a universal entitlement to national health services. People who want to go and stay with relatives and friends anywhere in the UK know what those fundamental provisions are.

In addition, there is a common currency throughout the UK, which is called the pound. If anything has caused tumult in the independence debate, it is the currency chaos that surrounds the prospect of an independent Scotland. I like the pound and always have done. I never shared the First Minister's view that sterling was "sinking like a stone" and a "millstone around Scotland's neck", nor did I share his passion for joining the euro, but I have always marvelled at his adroitness in changing his mind. Therefore, I should not have been surprised when, standing on his head, he rejected the euro and expressed such admiration for the pound that, if we become independent, nothing less than a currency union with the rest of the UK will do.

Unfortunately, such an arrangement is not under Mr Salmond's control. Whether it is possible will be down to whether what will be a new foreign country—the rest of the UK—agrees to it. Even the head of Mr Salmond's strategy unit, Colin McKay, has admitted that the SNP

"cannot assert as an a priori fact we can achieve a currency union with the UK".

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the member accept an intervention on that point?

Annabel Goldie: No, thanks.

Colin McKay is a wise man, because we cannot. The politicians under whom such a decision would be made have said no.

Interestingly, there is a comparison to be made here. This week, Mr Salmond went off to Europe on a charm offensive to explain why the other

member states should welcome, unconditionally and with open arms, an independent Scotland as a new member. Perhaps anticipating some unhelpful conditions of entry, such as having to join the euro, he brought out his negotiating masterpiece: if the other member states did not play ball, they would not be allowed access to Scottish fishing waters, nor would they be allowed access through them to Norway. It appears that when he says something, it is not bluff, bluster and bullying, but when the rest of the UK says something, it is.

People in Scotland like and value the pound and want to keep it as their currency. That can be guaranteed only by staying in the UK. A separate Scotland would have to join the euro or float a new currency.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her final minute.

Annabel Goldie: There are many aspects to the debate about Scotland's future. Colleagues and members across the chamber who support Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom will want to highlight areas and issues of interest to them.

I believe passionately and proudly in my country of Scotland, and I care about her future. I also believe passionately and with conviction that the UK is not some rigid, dusty abstract of constitutional law; it is a living, breathing, vibrant, flexible and dynamic partnership. In short, it is a unique union of nations. In a global world, it ensures that Scotland is at the centre of influence and decision making, and it maximises our ability to contribute to a positive world and our opportunity to benefit from that world.

Although I do not doubt the passion and conviction of those who desire independence, they cannot deliver the global influence that Scotland currently enjoys.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Annabel Goldie: They cannot provide the economic stability that we currently share, they cannot guarantee that the pound will continue to be our currency, they cannot tell us what the currency will be and they cannot deliver the best future for Scotland. Only by remaining in the UK can we achieve that. Only a no vote will secure that future.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the independence referendum is scheduled to take place in just over four-and-a-half months; is proud of the fact that Scotland enters this period recognised globally as an open, tolerant and

inclusive nation; notes that one of Scotland's greatest achievements, together with the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, has been to establish the world's greatest family of nations, the United Kingdom; believes that everyone in the UK can be proud of their individual country while remaining fully committed to the union of nations and that, as part of the same state, their collective contribution to each other and the world has, and will be, greater; notes that Scotland's future best lies as being part of a global success story, which, as a direct consequence of full union, provides opportunity, a stable currency, global influence and a capacity to absorb financial shocks, while enabling the Parliament to address and protect the country's distinctive culture, traditions and institutions in Scotland's own way, and considers that, given that the Scottish Government wants to bring an end to this success story, voters in Scotland are entitled to the facts and detailed information about separation, particularly in light of intervening developments, such as the publication of the recent Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report, the confirmation that there will be no currency sharing agreement for the pound following any vote for independence, the EU ruling that cross-border pension investments must be fully-funded and the clearly-emergent consensus that, as a new applicant, an independent Scotland will require to negotiate EU membership with all the other member states.

14:55

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): There is a real irony at the heart of this afternoon's Tory debate that would actually be quite funny if the matter were not so serious. Here we have the Tories extolling the virtues of devolution, when everyone in here and out there knows all too well that the Tories vigorously opposed devolution with many of the same arguments that we have just heard from Annabel Goldie. If we had listened to the Tories at the time of the last Scottish referendum, we would have left health, education, justice and every single other power that this Parliament has in the hands of Westminster.

The Tories were wrong in the last referendum—not just a wee bit wrong, but 100 per cent comprehensively wrong. Despite that, they expect people to believe them now when they say that it is best to leave powers over the economy, taxation, our welfare state—of all things—and energy and defence in the hands of their friends at Westminster.

Annabel Goldie: Does the cabinet secretary agree that it was a Tory-led Government at Westminster that in 2012 delivered the Scotland Act 2012, which has given this Parliament even greater powers?

Nicola Sturgeon: If Annabel Goldie thinks that the Scotland Act 2012 contains great powers, that should tell us all that, in the event of a no vote, we can expect nothing from these parties as far as more powers are concerned.

The truth of the matter is that the Tories are as wrong in this referendum as they were in the last one, but the tragedy for Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters is that this time the Tories have managed to dragoon the leaderships of those parties into their no campaign. The reality that I believe is obvious to decent Labour supporters the length and breadth of our country is that the Tories are the living embodiment of the democratic case for Scotland's being an independent country. Why should the party that in the past four general elections managed to win, in order, zero seats, one seat, one seat and one seat in Scotland be in any position of government? The answer is that they should not be; they have no democratic mandate to govern Scotland. Indeed, for half the time since 1945, we have been governed by Westminster Administrations with no mandate in Scotland and by parties that have been comprehensively rejected by the people of this country. It is a democratic outrage.

Indeed, if we vote no in September, we have no guarantee that the same thing will not happen again at next year's general election. Whatever Labour says about the next election, it cannot guarantee that we will not end up with another Tory Government. Scotland has too often in the past voted Labour only to end up with the Tories to have the wool pulled over our eyes, and the only way to guarantee that we do not get another Tory Government is to be independent.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): As Annabel Goldie was speaking, I heard the Deputy First Minister say that she must feel awful uncomfortable, but the truth is that Ms Goldie is as Scottish as the Deputy First Minister and me. Did the Deputy First Minister reject Annabel Goldie's mandate when she took her support to pass her budgets?

Nicola Sturgeon: Annabel Goldie is as Scottish as I am, but it is Drew Smith's position that leads to the risk of her party governing Scotland even though very few people vote for it. UK Labour is right now running a social media campaign that asks people to finish the statement, "The idea of 5 more years of Tory rule makes me—". The answer that more and more Labour supporters are coming up with in Scotland is: "The idea of 5 more years of Tory rule makes me determined to vote yes in September".

The second irony in this debate comes from Annabel Goldie's desperate attempt to put a veneer of positivity over the project fear campaign. We are now being told to vote no because the UK is "a partnership of equals", but the problem is that everything that the no campaign has said and done over the past months has demonstrated the exact opposite. We have had dire threats of what

will be done to us and what, according to that campaign, we will lose if we dare to vote yes.

The no campaign has made it clear that, in its view, we have no right to any of the shared assets that we have contributed to and paid for. It will be Westminster—and Westminster alone—that calls the shots. That is not an equal partnership. However, that has made it pretty clear to people in Scotland that the only way to get a true partnership of equals between the countries of these islands is to vote yes. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Johnstone!

Patrick Harvie: I agree with much of what the Deputy First Minister says, but does she not take heart a wee bit, as I do, from the tone of the Conservative motion? Is it not clear from the tone with which the Conservatives have opened the debate that they no longer regard independence as an absurd impossibility to laugh at? They are increasingly clear that they are losing momentum and the argument, and they are increasingly rattled that the people of Scotland are ready to vote yes.

Nicola Sturgeon: Absolutely. I agree wholeheartedly with Patrick Harvie; in fact, he preempted what I was about to come on to in my remarks.

There are many reasons why the no campaign is in deep trouble and the yes campaign is gaining ground, but I want to focus on three of them.

First, people are not daft. The no campaign did not ever seem to factor that into its calculations. People see through the scaremongering and they do not take kindly to the threats. Above all, they know that the ties that matter between our nations—of family, culture and history—do not depend on Westminster; they will endure regardless of how we are governed. We have only to listen to the words of the president of independent Ireland during his state visit to the UK a few weeks ago. He said:

“Our nations share a unique proximity. We also share a common narrative, woven through the manifold connections between our people and our heritage”.

Those words demonstrate, through the example of independent Ireland, that political independence and a strong and enduring social union go hand and hand.

People also know now that the no campaign’s position on the currency is bluff and bluster. We have not just had the unnamed minister; we have a report today that describes the currency position as

“confused logic ... inadequate economics”

and

“subterfuge to frighten”

the Scottish people.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: No. I am going to make progress. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: The no campaign’s currency bluff has been blown. It is in tatters. The question that is being asked now is: if people cannot believe the no campaign on the currency, as they cannot, why on earth should they believe it on anything else?

The second reason why the no campaign is in trouble is that people know that we need independence to put ourselves in the driving seat of our own decision making and end the situation in which we are at the mercy of decisions that are taken by Governments that we do not support. It is only by voting yes that we can ensure that we do not get saddled with Governments that we have rejected, secure our place in Europe and escape the risk of being taken out of it against our will by the UK Independence Party-driven politics of the Westminster parties. It is only by voting yes that we will get new powers for the Scottish Parliament and we can stop the dismantling of our welfare state.

I had to check that I was not seeing things when I read the Labour amendment.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not just now.

The Labour amendment talks about pooling, sharing and redistributing resources. When we read such stuff, we have to ask ourselves whether the Scottish Labour leadership is living on the same planet, let alone in the same country, as the rest of us. If Labour really thinks that £6 billion of cuts to social security, 100,000 more kids being pushed into poverty and a 400 per cent rise in demand for food banks represents redistribution, it has taken a very wrong turn somewhere.

Gavin Brown: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not just now.

The fact is that the best and only way to protect the institutions that we care about—what could be described as the best of British institutions—is to get the power to decide for ourselves what happens to them. We have proved that with the NHS. We now need independence to protect the welfare state, too.

I say to Annabel Goldie that I would much rather have an end to child poverty than a seat on the UN Security Council or weapons of mass destruction any day of the week. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Willie Rennie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: No. I am running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Deputy First Minister, you are in your final minute.

Nicola Sturgeon: The third reason why the yes campaign is gaining ground is that the more people hear the doom-mongers say that we cannot, the more the people of this country will say, loudly and clearly, "Yes, we can." We are the 14th richest country in the world. We are blessed with natural resources. We have world-class universities and industries. There is no doubt that we can be independent and the more the no campaign questions that, the more it insults our intelligence and damages its credibility. The question in this debate is not whether we are rich or strong enough to be independent, because the answer to that question is an emphatic yes. The real question is how we use our wealth as a country to create the kind of economy and society that we can all be proud of.

Willie Rennie: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that she is finishing. [*Interruption.*] Mr Rennie, the member is closing.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is about how we build a country in which kids do not grow up in poverty while billions are spent on nuclear weapons; a country that can protect the things that matter, like our NHS and our welfare state; a country that is confident, positive, outward looking, welcoming and can-do; and a country that takes responsibility for our own future and is not driven by the politics of Nigel Farage and UKIP.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must close.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is about a country that is capable of being a successful, progressive, socially just, prosperous, independent country. The only way to secure any of that is to vote yes.

I move amendment S4M-09844.3, to leave out from second "notes" to end and insert:

"agrees that only independence will guarantee Scotland governments that reflect the views of its people on all matters; notes that for 35 of the 69 years since 1945, Scotland has been governed by UK administrations with no electoral mandate in Scotland; regrets that decisions taken by the UK Government will remove £6 billion in welfare payments from Scotland, especially from its most

vulnerable families, resulting in up to 100,000 more children living in poverty; agrees that an independent Scotland would, per person, be one of the wealthiest nations in the developed world and that Scotland can more than afford to be an independent country, and notes that Scotland spends less of both its GDP and public revenues on social protection than the UK as a whole and that, with independence, the people of Scotland would have the power to abolish the so-called bedroom tax, halt the introduction of universal credit and the personal independence payment, build a welfare system based on principles of dignity, respect and fairness and would have the opportunity to grow Scotland's economy to its full potential, harness its natural resources and make Scotland a more equal and socially just society".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I must indicate that going over time at this stage will take time off back-bench speeches. I call on Drew Smith to speak to and move amendment S4M-09844.2. You have six minutes.

15:05

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Scotland joined a union with our nearest neighbours three centuries ago, and although a lot has changed since then—not least that there has been the advent of democracy, of devolution and of a much more closely integrated world—we on the Labour side of the chamber believe that Scotland can continue to enjoy the best of both worlds. Scotland has a strong Parliament that was created by Labour and which Labour is committed to both defending and enhancing.

The truth is that separation is not a development of devolution, but a decision to end it. Devolution rejects the nationalists' premise that decisions that are taken in Edinburgh are always good and decisions in London are always bad. Labour knows that good decisions are taken when the best argument wins out. Progressive politics is not a function of our nationality; it is born of a movement for change. I can be proud of the achievements of this Parliament and still believe in working together with like-minded people who happen to be Welsh or English, or from Northern Ireland.

Partnership in the union, however, means more than that. The Scottish National Party's current prospectus for independence is predicated on the idea that every interest group in the country can keep the things that they like about Britain and jettison anything that they do not like. When it comes to sharing a currency with our neighbours, I do not believe that Scotland can simply tell others what is in their interest. If people in Scotland exercise their choice in favour of partnership with the rest of the UK, as I hope they will, then let us be represented in it.

In a few weeks, Europe will vote for a multinational Parliament sitting in Brussels and Strasbourg. The SNP is keen to stress its support

for working together with other Europeans, while at the same time seeking to leave the UK. I agree that we should be part of Europe and therefore think that we should be represented there, too.

John Mason: Does Drew Smith feel that the current Westminster Government is enthusiastic enough about Europe? Does he agree that we should be a little bit more enthusiastic about our neighbours?

Drew Smith: My position on that is consistent: I believe in working together both in the UK and in Europe.

However, when it comes to Britain, the SNP tells us that it wants to share in the UK's institutions but at the same time to stop sending Scots men and women as our representatives in those institutions. The only logic that takes someone to such a position is that of nationalism. That is why we have had what I think is a telling insight this week into the nationalism that drives the Scottish Government. The First Minister's admiration, albeit that it was qualified, for President Putin of Russia is, we are told—[*Interruption.*]

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Mr Putin has welcomed that in the press this morning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Johnstone.

Drew Smith: In the SNP's estimation, President Putin has restored national pride, so the First Minister says that that can only be a good thing. Labour rejects that notion in this debate, just as we have rejected such sentiments throughout our history. The amendment that we have put before Parliament today makes it clear that our case for the UK is based on a clear and positive vision for working together with others. Britain is not, uniquely in all the countries of the world, incapable of political change. We reject the lumping together of Tony Benn and Margaret Thatcher as giants of something called—and dismissed as—the Westminster system, and the idea that campaigners against the bedroom tax here in Scotland and those in England are motivated by widely differing values.

That is the fundamental problem with nationalism, is it not? Political differences about how best to order and reorder our society are reduced to side issues in the debate that Scotland is currently having. Unlikely alliances and curious bedfellows are not an accident of such a debate: they are part of its very nature.

Mark McDonald: Will Drew Smith give way?

Drew Smith: No, thank you.

We hear that Brian Souter has opened his chequebook this week for a yes campaign that

also includes Tommy Sheridan as one of its most outspoken supporters. We are told that we can have Scandinavian services on Texan taxes. That is the offer in the white paper.

Patrick Harvie: Will Drew Smith give way?

Drew Smith: No, thank you.

That is why the motion is correct to highlight the inconsistencies of the Scottish Government and the unanswerable questions with which people are left. Since the publication of the white paper, there has been a collapse of a childcare policy that was never much more than a slogan anyway; there have been downward revisions of oil forecasts; there have been threats to turn off the lights in England and of defaults on debts; and this week we have heard about a blockade of our fishing grounds and excuses on the living wage instead of action.

When it comes to talk, the SNP will say absolutely anything. Scotland can be in Europe when it likes and on whatever terms it likes. We can withdraw our representation from the UK but still dictate currency arrangements to our neighbours. Shipyard workers whose jobs rely on UK defence contracts should be satisfied with promises of work that will not be kept. Pensioners should ignore the threats to their savings. The Government's amendment lays all of that out. There are policy promises for bigger benefits and smaller taxes, and none of it requires price tags.

This is the Government that delayed action on the bedroom tax and that continually postpones a credible report from its own welfare reform working group. As the debate has gone on, the yes campaign has had to deny its nationalism ever more frequently. What we have heard from the Deputy First Minister today is nothing new. It is the same old litany of negative nationalism, with poverty being used as a prop for constitutional politics, rather than being a challenge for those who have power now. There are boasts of Scotland's wealth, which we should take for ourselves, but there is no mention of how it would be redistributed among Scots, never mind the effects on others across the UK. Labour rejects the politics of nationalism, because we refuse to give up on our neighbours or to give in to the despair that the Government seeks to foment.

Labour will continue to make its positive case for partnership and co-operation, for pooling and sharing resources and facing risks together, with devolution not just for this Parliament but for the people and communities outside here, and with a Government that reflects the people whom it serves in word and in action, and not just through token gestures. That is the best of both worlds: a strong Scottish Parliament and Scottish representation in the UK, with politics driven by

new ideas, not outdated grievance, with a belief that challenging injustice is better than walking away from it and that common endeavour, not nationalism, is the truthful answer to the challenges that we face.

On behalf of Scottish Labour, I move amendment S4M-09844.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that the union of Scotland with England, Wales and Northern Ireland allows for the pooling and sharing of common resources across the UK, redistribution to those with least wherever they live and protection from the risks posed by separation both to public services and to workers in key sectors that are major sources of employment, including financial services, shipbuilding and associated industries, and considers that the continued lack of certainty over which currency would be used for wages, savings and paying bills represents a failure of the Scottish Government to respond to the real concerns of the Scottish people.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The debate is very tight for time, so I ask for speeches of six minutes at the moment, although that will reduce to five minutes.

15:12

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Although I did not support the referendum, it has given us a chance to explore the strengths and weaknesses of our nation. It helps because, I believe, we take so much of the UK for granted.

Here are some of the many positive strengths that I regard as being part of the United Kingdom. There is the single energy market, which keeps our bills lower and advances renewables. There is the single regulatory regime, and there is the single currency that helps businesses to trade freely across the United Kingdom. There is the shared research funding for universities, which gives Scottish researchers 50 per cent more funding.

We know that those are positive strengths for the United Kingdom, because the nationalists repeatedly tell us so. They like them so much that they want to keep them. It is their plans that will put an end to those strengths. In the topsy-turvy world of the nationalists, they argue for the things that they want to break.

In this long campaign, we have also learned more about the independence proposition, although questions remain. Let us take welfare, which has been cited in the Deputy First Minister's very negative amendment. She cites a £6 billion cut in the welfare budget for Scotland. However, even a simple study of the white paper tells us that reversing that cut is not quite the priority that the SNP claims it to be. The white paper does not provide for the promised big increase in social security spending, and certainly not for £6 billion or £2.5 billion, which was the previous figure. We

would have thought, if the SNP cared that much about the welfare budget, that it would have provided the funds to match its words. The truth is that the SNP is planning to implement 98 per cent of Iain Duncan Smith's budget. Far from reversing the welfare reforms, the SNP plans to lock them in. So much for the positive promise for an independent Scotland.

Members will know of the Liberal Democrats' ambition on nursery education. Thanks to our pressure, thousands of two-year-old children will get 15 hours of nursery education each week from this autumn. That is alongside the expansion in childcare for three and four-year-olds to match the provision in England. The SNP had said that such provision would not be possible without the powers of independence, yet it is being delivered under devolution.

We now know—thanks to the Scottish Parliament information centre—that the sums do not add up on childcare under independence. In contrast, devolution in the UK has expanded childcare. That is another positive reason to be for the United Kingdom.

Then, there is the SNP's plan to cut corporation tax by 3p. Last summer, I lodged parliamentary questions to ask how long it would take for tax revenues to recover. The answers dodged the question. When I made freedom of information requests to get hold of the detailed modelling so that we could work out the answer for ourselves, the response from the Scottish Government official was interesting. This is good—she refused to give out the information and said:

“releasing the data and assumptions behind the simulations may lead to opposition parties starting a debate”.

She went on to say—listen to this—that that “would not be in the public interest”.

The Scottish Information Commissioner has now given the Scottish Government permission to keep the information secret, because ministers told her that

“policy in this area remained under active development, and they had not reached a settled view on it.”

For those of us who hear the mantra of certainty on corporation tax every day of the week, it is odd to find out that ministers have not finished working out the policy.

We have heard today from Professor Leslie Young, whom the Deputy First Minister has cited and whom she has previously credited with being an international expert. However, she has not read out his full conclusions. He said that

“‘all the United Kingdom' would be worse off if an independent Scotland formed a currency union with”

the rest of the UK

“than if the UK remained united.”

The full quotation has not been used. We have often been criticised for not providing a good quotation and I thought that the Deputy First Minister would follow that rule. Tom Hunter, who paid for Professor Young’s report, concluded that

“this one narrow line of inquiry highlights the status quo as the best option for business.”

That is quite revealing.

I am particularly proud that, together across the UK, we have created the NHS, which is free at the point of access, as well as the welfare state, the state pension and now the second-biggest aid budget in the world.

Let us consider the positive contribution from the aid budget, which is praised internationally. It is feeding thousands of children in Pakistan and Syria and it is immunising thousands of children in many other countries.

I am proud of what we do in the UK and I share Annabel Goldie’s positivity about the UK. I am proud to regard myself as British as well as Scottish, and I do not want anybody to take either of those identities away from me. That is why I think that we should stay in the UK together, because we have achieved much together and we should continue to do so in the future.

15:18

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): When I joined the Scottish National Party on general election day in 1992, I did so for one reason—I felt that there was a democratic deficit in Scotland and I realised that the Tories were about to win that election. I firmly believe that decisions about the people of Scotland are best made here in Scotland.

Let us look at where we are, at present. When we include all the MPs and lords, people in Scotland elect just 4.1 per cent of the UK Parliament. Even the opinions of the folk whom we elect to serve in the House of Commons are largely ignored and mean little.

Let us look at some recent votes and at some significant votes in the past. In the 2010 budget, 76 per cent of Scottish MPs voted against further austerity cuts. They were ignored. We have the continued curb on growth and the failures that austerity brings. In the Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill, 81 per cent of Scottish MPs voted against the welfare cuts. They were ignored, and families throughout this country are being put under more pressure.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): One of the significant votes that was not ignored was that of

the Scottish National Party MPs who went through the lobbies to bring in Thatcher. Why did Mr Stewart not refer to that?

Kevin Stewart: Mr Findlay goes back to ancient history—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Kevin Stewart: The failings of the Labour Government under Jim Callaghan led to its demise. A no-confidence vote mattered not one jot because he was going to be out on his ear anyway—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Kevin Stewart: Let us continue with welfare. *[Interruption.]* I would prefer it if Mr Findlay did not shout over me.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, I have called for order, so I hope that we will get order throughout the chamber. Please continue.

Kevin Stewart: The Child Poverty Action Group says that the welfare cuts may lead to 50,000 to 100,000 children being pushed into poverty by 2020. That is not something that the people of Scotland want, which is why our representatives down there voted against the cuts. They were ignored.

In 2007, 60 per cent of Scottish MPs voted against Trident renewal. They were ignored. Annabel Goldie gave a stout defence of nuclear weapons; I find it difficult to understand why anybody could do so. She talked about global peace and our power on the global stage. I have more regard for the Marshall Islands and their place on the global stage because of their efforts to gain global peace by suing the nuclear powers for their actions. That is a small country that has suffered as a result of nuclear testing and so realises the effects of those weapons. I say, “Praise to the Marshall Islands. Let us follow their lead and ensure that our country becomes nuclear-weapons free after a yes vote later this year.”

Let us concentrate, however, on some of the recent evidence on welfare cuts. At the Welfare Reform Committee yesterday, we heard from Mr Couling of the Department for Work and Pensions—a man who had to come up here and defend Conservative ministers because they are too feart to come to committee themselves to defend their policies and actions. Yesterday, Mr Couling said that the rise of food banks was due not to demand but to supply. I have never heard such claptrap in my life. It clearly shows that neither he nor the ministers that he represents have taken the time and energy to meet folks who have daily to rely on food banks.

Jamie Livingstone of Oxfam Scotland said yesterday that it is not credible to deny the links between welfare cuts and food banks; in my opinion, to do so is completely and utterly outrageous. The Secretary of State for Scotland has proclaimed that our welfare system is fantastic. I would like him to say that in front of the many folks who are currently suffering because of the welfare cuts that are emanating from Westminster.

During the course of this debate and the referendum debate, we have heard scaremongering galore. We have heard Better Together proclaim itself to be project fear. What I would say to the people of Scotland is that on 18 September, vote for hope over fear. Vote yes and get rid of the democratic deficit.

15:24

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): The SNP clearly hopes that merely spreading an anti-Tory message in Scotland will make people vote yes in the referendum. However, this is not a general election for five years; this is a referendum for life. I am happy to support the Conservative motion today, as well as the Labour amendment, because I believe that there are certain clear advantages to being in the United Kingdom, irrespective of which Government is in power at Westminster. Several of those features were outlined in the opening speeches and in Willie Rennie's speech, in which he talked about the single energy market.

Annabel Goldie talked about the capacity to absorb financial shocks—we all remember 2008. She also talked about a stable currency; clearly, the reputation of sterling is an enormous asset for the whole United Kingdom, and is one of the reasons why interest rates are low now and would be higher in an independent Scotland.

The Labour amendment talks about "pooling ... resources". That was mocked by Nicola Sturgeon, but there are many examples. Pensions, as described in detail by Gordon Brown in a major speech last week, is a classic example of an area in which we get hundreds of millions of pounds more than our population share—that is what goes to the pensioners of Scotland. Jobs is another example, as was mentioned by Drew Smith. The situation in the financial services, shipbuilding and many other areas would be far more difficult in an independent Scotland.

Another good example, which follows on from what Willie Rennie said about the single energy market, is provided in an article by Peter Jones in yesterday's *Scotsman*. He reminded us that the SNP is always complaining about the charging regime, and then listed about five different ways in

which taxpayers in England and Wales help the renewable industries in Scotland, and said that their contribution comes to £800 million a year.

All that we hear from the SNP are the negatives. However, there are many positives, irrespective of which party is in Government. Of course, I am critical of the Conservatives in many contexts, but we must remember the positives that prevail, whatever Government we have.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): On the point that accepting the UK's pernicious welfare policies, economic stagnation and increasing inequality is a price worth paying to stay in the union, what exactly is a red-line issue for a member, such as Malcolm Chisholm, with a social conscience?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am sorry, but I did not follow the logic of that question. It was probably another attempt to suggest that the Tories and Labour are somehow joined at the hip. Of course, the SNP is very good at inventing the enemy, just as it is good at inventing the future, as I will describe in a moment. Of course, the SNP has Trotskyists and others on its side, but no one is accusing Nicola Sturgeon of being a Trotskyist.

With regard to inventing the future, I do not ask SNP members to read what the UK Government has produced today; I ask them only to consider what the independent experts are saying. Many of them, including some that we heard from in the Finance Committee this morning, describe the fiscal challenges that would exist for an independent Scotland.

Of course, SNP members quote experts selectively from time to time. I noticed Nicola Sturgeon quoting on the radio the other morning one small part of the budgetary analysis of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research—I will give its general view in a moment. Willie Rennie talked about how Leslie Young was selectively quoted. I do not suppose that the SNP is quoting Standard & Poor's at all this week, since it said that we would probably be in a situation like that of Ireland in 2008.

I do not have time to quote all the experts whose quotations I have written down, but the general thrust is summed up by a quotation from a National Institute of Economic and Social Research paper by Angus Armstrong and Monique Ebell, which says:

"An independent Scotland is likely to require a more restrictive fiscal stance than proposed by the coalition government for many years."

A paper by Rowena Crawford and Gemma Tetlow, also from the NIESR, says:

“our broad conclusion—that Scotland faces a tougher long-run fiscal challenge than the UK as a whole—is robust to a variety of alternative, sensible assumptions.”

I have several other quotations that I do not have time to read out.

I mentioned interest rates. Again, at the Finance Committee this morning, I specifically asked Angus Armstrong from the NIESR about interest rates. He said that they would be higher, even if there were a monetary union—which, of course, there will not be. He went on to say that, if there were not a currency union, they would be higher still. There are many reasons for that. One that he gave was the liquidity premium that is placed on smaller bond markets.

John Mason: Will Malcolm Chisholm give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I would if I had time, but I have only a minute and a half left.

That is the reality that is ignored by those who are unhappy with the current UK Government. I understand that unhappiness—obviously, I have a different view from the Conservatives opposite—and I understand that some of them think that the situation in Scotland cannot get worse. Well, the fact of the matter is that the situation in Scotland could get worse, just as the situation in the UK could get better—I believe that it will—with the election of a Labour Government.

The nightmare for members on the Labour benches is that in 2016 we might have a radical Labour Government in London taking action on market failure and income inequality, while we are stuck here with a more right-wing SNP Government cutting corporation tax and giving a free ride to the energy companies. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Malcolm Chisholm: I used the word “nightmare” advisedly, because, as I said, this is not a protest vote in a general election but a vote for life. In “Ulysses”, Stephen Dedalus famously says:

“History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake”.

I have looked at all the evidence and listened to all the experts, and I think that independence is a nightmare from which we would never awake.

15:30

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): At last year’s festival of politics, my family and I were lucky enough to have tickets for the Scottish Youth Theatre’s production of “Now is the Hour”. The play was written by and for young people and is about their thoughts, fears, aspirations and experiences around the referendum. On Saturday evening members might, like me, have enjoyed

watching a documentary about the making of “Now is the Hour”.

The play comes to no conclusion about which way to vote, but it demonstrates how knowledgeable, practical, passionate and inspired the young people of Scotland are about the independence debate. I was particularly taken with the exercise of writing a letter to one’s future self some 30 years down the line, about one’s hopes for the future. Perhaps politicians would benefit from doing that. I hope that I would be around to read mine. Inshallah.

During the documentary, young people highlighted the big issues for them in relation to the referendum. For them, it is about what kind of country we want to be, how cohesive a country it will be, whether our education will still be free, whether we will still have nuclear weapons and what climate change will mean for our future. The documentary, and indeed the play, reminded me that Scotland’s future is the future of those young people and the generations to come. On 18 September, we will have the biggest opportunity to ask ourselves the big questions and to shape the country that Scotland can be.

The economic argument has been made. There is no doubt that Scotland can more than afford to be an independent nation. Recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures show that Scotland would be the 14th richest nation in terms of gross domestic product. Oil is a bonus on top of Scotland’s economic capabilities, as the ratings agency Standard & Poor’s has demonstrated.

We should be independent, because although Scotland has demonstrated time and time again that the political will is for policies of social justice, yet again we find ourselves with a Westminster Government for which we did not vote and whose policies will drive 100,000 more children in Scotland into poverty by 2020. At the same time, £100 billion will be spent on weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): If the member’s party and Government are so committed to tackling poverty, why has the Government taken £1 billion out of the poverty budget since it was elected in 2007?

Clare Adamson: I challenge Ms Marra’s assertion—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Clare Adamson: I challenge questions about the Government’s commitment to tackling poverty, which it has set out in debates that we have had in the Parliament. Ms Marra’s Labour colleague mentioned the Government’s action on the bedroom tax. In a fixed budget, when we spend

money to mitigate the bedroom tax, that money cannot be spent on other issues, such as poverty in Scotland.

In the documentary, many of the young people expressed worry. We hear that worry on the doorsteps, too. People are worried that if they make the wrong decision, whatever that might be, they will contribute to making things worse. Malcolm Chisholm said that things could get worse. They could indeed. We could move even further up the shameful list of the most unequal countries in the developed world—we are currently in fourth place. If Mr Osborne's austerity policies continue, that is likely.

In addition, there is the referendum on Europe, as promised by the Conservatives—or whichever Government might be elected to Westminster. As we discussed in this very chamber last week, Scotland has a proud tradition as a European nation that wants to engage with Europe, and yet we could be dragged out of Europe on the back of votes from the rest of the UK.

A few issues about Scotland have been mentioned during the debate. Mr Rennie mentioned international development. Given that we have just celebrated the anniversary of one of the greatest people in the world who reached out to Malawi—a Scottish person—we must consider that the UK is one of the richest countries in the world. However, that 0.7 per cent target of GNI to be spent on international development has been reached only once, last year. We could do so much more as an independent nation.

I hope that what we take from today's debate is the fact that we are thinking about the future of our young people such as my son and future generations, and about what Scotland could be in the future. I know that, in my letter to myself, I would have promised that

"it is fundamentally better for us all, if decisions about Scotland's future are taken by the people who care most about Scotland, that is, by the people of Scotland."

15:36

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I remember the late Donald Dewar saying to me that devolution is a journey, and it is a journey that we are on. I do not disagree with Clare when she says that Scotland can be an independent country; of course it can. I have never argued that Scotland cannot be independent, but the issue is whether it is in Scotland's best interests to be independent, or whether it is in Scotland's best interests to be in a union with the rest of the United Kingdom and, as part of that, to have a strong devolved Government in Edinburgh. That has always been the position that I have supported.

As we move forward in the debate, there are legitimate concerns that cannot just be dismissed as scaremongering or project fear. The Scottish people deserve better. There are legitimate issues around Europe, pensions and the pound. As I have said before, I do not believe that it would be in Scotland's interests—never mind those of England, Wales or Northern Ireland—if an independent Scottish was part of a currency deal with the rest of the UK.

Those are legitimate questions. However, I say to Annabel Goldie that every time that David Cameron and his Cabinet of millionaires come up to Scotland to tell the Scottish people what they cannot get, the yes vote increases. It would be advisable for them to think before they speak about the messages that they bring to Scotland.

If we look at the United Kingdom's welfare reforms, members of the Scottish Parliament accept that there is a need to reform the welfare system, but the way to do that is not to drive people into absolute poverty and to have the massive increase in food banks that we have seen starting up in every part of Scotland.

It would be difficult for me to stand on any campaign platform and say that my vision for the future of Scotland and how we would achieve that vision would resemble that of the Conservative Party. My vision for Scotland is that we eradicate poverty, and social stability sits alongside economic stability, but I have not seen that type of vision being proposed by the SNP Government in Scotland. If we are going to address poverty, we need to address the housing crisis. However, during my time in local government the SNP Government cut the housing budget and money that was coming into local government in Fife.

If we look at jobs, training and skills, we can see that the further education sector is being cut right across the country. In my constituency, we have jobs but we do not have the people with the skills; the large companies in my constituency are using recruitment agencies all over Europe to bring people here, and they are building special accommodation in Fife to house those people. Something does not add up, so we need a national skills strategy. The vision for the future of Scotland must surely be based on full employment, and in order to achieve full employment we must have the skills and opportunities that go alongside that. I have not seen that type of vision coming from the SNP Government, but the Labour vision that I want for the future of Scotland has those things in it.

We need a radical overhaul of education. A progressive policy on education would look at the less well-performing schools, which tend to have a clear link with deprivation and poverty. Fife Council made a deliberate policy decision during

the past couple of years to target more money on deprived areas, and by using the free school meals quota we managed to target that money, because it is recognised that there is a clear correlation between underperformance in some of those areas and poverty. I have not seen that kind of radical agenda or approach coming from the Scottish Government.

In looking to the future, those concerns have to be addressed, but the big issue for me is about the vision that we want in Scotland for the future. I want full employment, housing that is available at the point of need and a strong health service, and the question for me is how we can best provide those services and achieve that ambition—is it through an independent Scotland or through a strong Scotland as part of the United Kingdom? For me, it is the latter. That is what it comes down to, and that is what I hope the debate will be about as we move forward, so that we can debate all the concerns that are out there and we can put forward the vision. Ultimately, it will be for the people of Scotland to decide on 18 September, but I will certainly make the case for a stronger Scotland within the United Kingdom.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to use one another's full names, for the record and for the benefit of those who are watching our proceedings.

15:42

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I welcome the chance to take part in today's debate and I thank the Conservatives for initiating it. The concept of a family of nations, which they mention in their motion, is an important one, and I would like to look at that, first with reference to my personal experience.

I had a reasonable relationship with my parents, despite the usual struggles in my teenage years, and they supported me in all sorts of ways, not least in helping me through a university education. However, when I started working and was in my early 20s, I so much wanted to move out and start living in my own place. I have to say that I think that my relationship with my parents improved after that. We still saw one another regularly, discussed serious matters and even did things together, but we were not getting in one another's way so much and I did not feel that someone was always looking over my shoulder. I suspect that that is not an unusual story for a lot of young people.

There is a parallel for Scotland. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the past, we are now grown-up people and can manage our own affairs.

There are some interesting phrases in the motion, and I would like to look at seven of them if I have time. First of all, we have the phrase, "the world's greatest family of nations".

Is there actually any evidence for that, or is it just an assertion? It smacks to me a little bit of arrogant British nationalism looking down on others. What about all the other families of nations around the world? For example, the Commonwealth is a good family that I am part of. I look around the world and I see the African nations, many of which have a good family relationship with one another. It is the same for the Arab nations and the Latin nations. More recently, we feel—I certainly do—that we are part of the European family of nations. Are we seriously saying that the UK is the world's best family? That is what the motion seems to be saying, but I do not think that anyone else thinks that.

The second interesting phrase is contained in the statement that the UK can give us "a stable currency".

Willie Rennie: I am sure that I have heard ministers say that Scotland would be the best small nation in the world. Is John Mason now asking his ministers to refrain from using such a phrase?

Derek Mackay: That was not one of ours.

John Mason: My memory is not perfect, but I think that it might have been Jack McConnell who said that.

John Swinney: Sorry, Willie!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

John Mason: The second interesting phrase in the motion is "a stable currency". Is the pound the great stable currency that we are led to believe? I remember, not that long ago, that we could buy a euro for 70p, but I checked the paper yesterday and found that it is now 82p. The reality is that the pound has been devalued because of poor management of the UK economy.

Drew Smith: If the pound is now back to being a millstone, why is the Scottish Government so keen to be part of it, while at the same time giving up any influence over all the issues that Mr Mason talks about?

John Mason: Currently, we have zero influence. It would be extremely convenient to use the pound, and that is our first choice, but the white paper makes it clear that there are other options. It will be one of the bargaining chips on the table.

The third interesting phrase is "global influence". Does the UK have global influence? Clearly, it does not have as much influence as it used to

have. Again, that is an assertion, but is there any evidence for it? I accept that the UK tries to cling on to past influence by having nuclear weapons and aircraft carriers as if it was a world power, but we all know that the UK is now a second or even third-tier country, and even the nuclear weapons can be used only with US permission.

Annabel Goldie: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: No—I have taken two already.

The fourth interesting phrase is that the UK has “capacity to absorb financial shocks”.

Does the UK have that capacity? It has not recovered from the last shock—it is hugely in debt and is still running a huge deficit. Household debt is among the highest in the developed world, and capital and welfare expenditure are being severely cut. The UK may have survived the last shock, but I do not think that we can say that it has absorbed it. Heaven help us if the UK has to face another shock soon.

The fifth interesting phrase is that the motion calls for “facts and detailed information”. Can we also have that for the UK? Will the UK be in the European Union in 10 years’ time? Will the Barnett formula continue? Will the UK eventually join the euro? Will it become a fairer society? Are there any facts on those issues? I think that I saw a statement on a billboard from Better Together that said, “more powers guaranteed”. Are they guaranteed? Is that a fact? Actually, there are no facts about the future, although we can have plans, information and vision, so let us be realistic in the debate.

The sixth phrase is that there will be “no currency sharing agreement”. Is that just a bluff or is it part of the debate? We have no idea. The seventh phrase is that Scotland would be a “new applicant” to the EU. The reality is that I am already a European citizen, that the EU has never faced the same situation before and that it will all be done by negotiation.

I do not want to let Labour off entirely, as its amendment also has some interesting phrases. The Deputy First Minister referred to the phrase that the union

“allows ... redistribution to those with least”.

To be fair, I suppose that that is technically correct—the union allows for redistribution; it just does not actually happen. When I was younger, the Labour Party at Westminster went in for a bit of redistribution, nationalisation and suchlike, but even when it did so, that was undone by the next Tory Government. The result is that we have one of the most unfair societies in the developed world.

Surely Labour members do not think that the UK is going to do any redistributing soon.

15:48

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I will focus on an issue that has featured heavily in the yes campaign. It features in the SNP amendment and it featured heavily in the Deputy First Minister’s speech and in most of the speeches from SNP members. That is, the issue of welfare. The SNP and the yes campaign use it day in, day out, but it is worth looking at the facts to see what the SNP proposes and what commitments the Scottish Government has made. Many of the claims that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have made are not backed up in cash by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, and I hope that he will deal with some of my questions in his closing speech.

A recent Scottish Government press release has the headline

“£6 billion cut from welfare budget”.

The Government states that it regrets the decisions that have been taken by the UK Government, which will remove £6 billion in welfare payments. The press release states:

“we are committed to mitigating against the harmful effects of Westminster welfare reforms”.

The Scottish Government wants us, and the people of Scotland, to believe that all those welfare reforms—covering the entirety of the £6 billion that it states—would be reversed in an independent Scotland. It says that it has limited powers at present. Putting that to one side, let us look at what it says that it would do if it had all the powers in the event of a yes vote, were that to happen. The Scottish Government wants us to think that it would reverse everything, but the reality is somewhat different.

The largest single measure—by quite some distance—in the welfare changes in financial terms is, as the Deputy First Minister will know, the switch in indexation from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index, which occurred in 2011-12 and has been in place ever since. I have asked the Scottish Government on a number of occasions whether it would reverse that switch and move back to RPI indexation in the event of Scotland becoming independent. If the answer to that question is no, the Government cannot claim the single largest chunk in that £6 billion; its argument becomes false unless there is a clear commitment to reverse that decision.

The second-largest single measure is the removal—or in some cases the reduction—of child benefit from families with a higher-rate taxpayer. The Scottish Government says that those changes

have hit families hard, but is there a commitment anywhere—in the white paper or in any press release from the Government—that it would reverse that decision and that all higher-rate taxpayers would be entitled to child benefit? I have not seen that mentioned once, and it is the second-largest single part of the £6 billion.

There is no commitment to the largest measure, nor to the second-largest measure. If the Scottish Government is not addressing the two largest parts of the £6 billion, that figure loses a lot of its legitimacy.

The Scottish Government has said that it would abolish the spare room subsidy, restore housing benefit as a separate benefit and review the assessments regime. However, if it does all that—taking at face value all that it says that it will do in the event that Scotland becomes independent—how much of the £6 billion will that add back? Is it £200 million or even £100 million? The people of Scotland have a right to know whether what the SNP is saying on the campaign trail will be implemented in practice. The fact that I have not had a single intervention from a single Government minister or from any MSP suggests that what the UK Government is doing on welfare and what a separate Scottish Government would do in practice are not altogether different.

The SNP wants to campaign on welfare, which it believes will give it traction. It may well do, but what the Government would actually do is a very different picture, as the changes on the ground would be minimal.

A couple of weeks ago we debated in the chamber the financial implications of an independent Scotland. We pointed out that the figures in the white paper—such as they exist—had been overtaken by events some time ago. Where are the updated oil figures that we were promised by the cabinet secretary? He said that we would get them within a matter of weeks. Can he update Parliament today on when those figures will be published? Everyone has a right to see them, and—while we are at it—a right to see the updated finances for post 2016-17, which he also promised in that debate. When will we see those?

As it stands, the Scottish Government says that the net fiscal balance for Scotland will be healthier than that for the UK, when every independent analyst that has published since then has said the opposite. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can update Parliament today.

15:54

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I thank Annabel Goldie for lodging the motion for debate today. Its content has provided me with an

opportunity to reflect on what I think about Scotland's place in the United Kingdom.

I will start by talking about my family's connection with the British armed forces. I am very proud of that connection, but it has not blinded me to the truth. My grandfather served with the Scottish Horse in the great war and fought in some of the most horrific battles of that conflict. I am proud of my grandfather's role in that fighting. As he saw it, he was fighting for King and country. My father was a member of the royal Household Cavalry and declared it almost every day of his life as he wore his Brigade of Guards ties until they were threadbare. I am proud of my father's connection with the Household Cavalry, and there was never a father more proud than I was at RAF Halton for the ceremony to mark one of my sons' completion of his RAF training.

However, no matter how proud I have felt, I have never been blinded by that pride. I remember well my father's rage in his belief that the people of Scotland had been lied to by the Blair Government in order to drag the British armed forces into an illegal war in Iraq—an illegal war that the same son and I, along with 100,000 others, marched against through the streets of Glasgow shouting, "Not in our name!" All that was to no avail, as the wishes of the majority of the people of Scotland were ignored.

Willie Rennie: Will the member take an intervention?

Bruce Crawford: Unusually, I am not going to take any interventions today.

My father also believed that if it had been Scotland's decision to make, Scottish servicemen and servicewomen would never have been asked to take part in that illegal invasion of Iraq. My father was right. The political system in the UK failed Scotland when it came to the most important decision of all—the decision whether to send people to war.

Let us look also at the UK's nuclear deterrent, which is based on the Clyde. We know the colossal cost of creating and maintaining those weapons. The Trident replacement that is favoured by the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats would cost £100 billion. Here, too, we see a political system that is failing the people of Scotland. Opinion polls show clearly that the Scottish population is overwhelmingly opposed to those obscene weapons of mass destruction being based in Scotland. A majority of Scottish MPs and parliamentarians in the Scottish Parliament are against the renewal of Trident nuclear weapons. Where is the democracy for Scotland when it comes to the obscenity of nuclear weapons?

When it comes to sport, I cheered as loudly as anyone when a British sportsman was

competing in the Olympics. When England takes the field in this summer's world cup, I will be rooting for the team to win, much to the astonishment of my sons.

However, none of that support will blind me to the fact that the current political system has failed—and is failing—Scotland. That failing is all too well highlighted by the deceitful cover-up of the now infamous McCrone report. That report on the economic implications of Scottish independence was prepared by a senior civil servant and delivered to the United Kingdom Government on 23 April 1975. The report concluded that an independent Scotland would have a large tax surplus to an “embarrassing degree”. Its finding was that there was no question whatever that Scotland could be a viable and prosperous independent country.

The reaction of the UK Government was to classify the report as “secret”, as though it was some piece of cold war intelligence that had been garnered by the security services rather than a report by a civil servant that was paid for by Scottish taxpayers. The McCrone report is as clear an example as one could find of the interests of the Scottish people being sacrificed for the greater good of the United Kingdom.

What about taxation and benefits? Here, too, the case for remaining locked within the UK falls down. We need only look back a short time to the poll tax to see and understand Scotland's place in the union. That iniquitous tax was implemented in 1989 in Scotland, one year earlier than in England and Wales. It was introduced in the face of fierce opposition across Scotland and a campaign of non-payment in which I was involved. The poll tax was repealed, but only following riots on its introduction in England and Wales. It is a telling fact that the tax was dispensed with only when voters south of the border refused to countenance it. Scotland's wishes were obviously inconsequential.

I can take pride in my family's involvement in the British armed forces and I will support British people on the field of sport. However, Scotland's constitutional relationship with our neighbours across these islands must change so that Scotland's Governments and political institutions always and unquestionably serve the interests of the Scottish people.

I said at the beginning of my speech that the Tory motion provided me with an opportunity to reflect on what I feel about Scotland being part of the United Kingdom. Regrettably, the motion is mostly an unconvincing series of rambling assertions and a confused defence of a political union that has long since lost any benefit that it may ever have had for the vast majority of the people of Scotland. The Scottish people's best

interests will be served only when the people of Scotland have control of their own future. I am confident that a majority across this country will reach the same conclusion and vote for independence on 18 September.

16:00

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I, too, thank Annabel Goldie for securing the debate. My nationality is Scottish, my passport is British and my citizenship is European. Those three strands of my identity do not conflict with my enjoying more than 300 years of economic and political unity in the United Kingdom. We do not need independence to identify ourselves.

No one can say how successfully an independent Scotland would negotiate its relationships with other countries or its entry into various global bodies. However, we know that the UK is an established and respected world power that uses its influence for our common good. My very clear impression from speaking to voters is that they do not want independence; rather, they just want devolution to work better.

Most Scots want to continue with devolution and the success that it brings. They do not want to go it alone or to choose to separate from the rest of the UK, with all the risks and uncertainties that that would bring. I want the best for my country. I want us to have control over Scottish affairs while having the power, influence and strength gained through our membership of the UK and the immense trade and free movement benefits from being in the European Union. In short, I want us to have the best of both worlds—and why not?

The SNP wants to gamble with the future of our country and its people's livelihoods in its drive to separate from the UK. Such a separation cannot be all rewards and no risks. A future with the UK includes a capacity to reduce risks. Furthermore, everyone in the UK can be proud of their individual countries while remaining fully committed to the union of nations.

If we leave the UK and renegotiate or are denied entry into the European Union, we will be on our own without the pound or the euro. The Scottish Government has failed to give any guarantees regarding the membership of the European Union. The SNP says that Scotland will automatically join the European Union, but has the EU agreed that that would happen? Not to the best of my knowledge. The SNP says that it will not have nuclear weapons in Scotland, so why join NATO? Has NATO even agreed that Scotland could join under those terms and conditions? Not to my knowledge, so I look forward to clarification on the matter. The SNP says that it will keep the pound. That is the biggest joke of all. Who has

agreed to that? I do not want the country to follow the pied piper over a cliff into the economic unknown. The Labour Party says no to that.

On how people in Scotland feel, there has been a lot of talk about people serving in the armed forces and how patriotic they are—what patriotic Scots they are. A survey of university and college students in Glasgow suggested that people from minority communities were more Scottish than the Scots themselves. I like to think that I fall into that category.

I have travelled the world and I have seen the misfortunes and hardships that people suffer. Scotland is not like the countries in Africa or other second and third world countries that are looking for independence. We are professional, smart and a country of inventors. However, I do not want to pretend that we can throw all that away and gamble on the unknown, with no guarantees whatsoever for my children and grandchildren. I will not stand idly by and allow that to happen. I assure the chamber that I will not vote yes in the referendum.

16:05

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): It is good to hear that the prophets of doom are still among us. Frankly, I have seldom heard a more depressing speech in the Parliament. Lord Robertson must be very proud of Mr Malik.

I thought that it would be apt to begin with a quote from the Prime Minister, who said:

“Supporters of independence will always be able to cite examples of small, independent and thriving economies across Europe such as Finland, Switzerland and Norway. It would be wrong to suggest that Scotland could not be another such successful, independent country.”

On that point, I agree with the Prime Minister.

Mr Cameron is not the only UK political leader to recognise the benefits of being a small independent country. During a speech on social mobility to the Sutton Trust in 2012, a certain Ed Miliband said:

“When you look around the world and compare the rates of social mobility, there is a striking fact. If you are born poor in a more equal society like Finland, Norway or Denmark then you have a better chance of moving into a good job than if you are born poor in the United States.”

Ed Miliband and David Cameron accept that being a small country is no barrier to delivering fairness, equality and prosperity.

OECD figures show that seven of the 10 richest countries in the developed world have populations of less than 10 million people. The question is, if those small nations can thrive as successful independent countries, why cannot Scotland?

I believe that, rather than just looking to other countries for examples of how to do things differently, an independent Scotland can lead the way and set standards for equality and fairness that will be envied across the world. I see September's referendum as a once-in-a-generation chance to change Scotland for the better. For me, independence is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is about giving us the tools to build a better country. It is about shaping Scotland into a country that meets our aspirations for fairness, prosperity and opportunity.

I want Scotland to maximise its potential and to take advantage of the opportunities that independence will bring. The reality is that that can happen only if Scotland unties itself from a Westminster system of government that continues to hold our country—and, more important, our people—back.

The Sutton Trust estimates that the richest 10 per cent of UK households have 44 per cent of the UK's wealth. By contrast, the poorest 50 per cent of UK households have less than 10 per cent of the country's wealth. Figures show that there has been a 400 per cent increase in food bank use as a result of cuts implemented by the Tory-led UK Government. One in five children here grows up in poverty, and Oxfam has said that up to 100,000 more children in Scotland will be pushed into poverty by 2020 as a result of decisions taken at Westminster. There is clear evidence that the Westminster welfare system is not working for the people of Scotland.

Scotland's potential to take a different approach to welfare was highlighted last week by Morag Gillespie of the Scottish poverty information unit at Glasgow Caledonian University. In a submission to the Parliament, Ms Gillespie outlined the devastating impact that Westminster's cuts are having on households. She said that independence

“presents a unique opportunity for Scottish society to take a different path, one that aims for a society free of poverty and where inequality is much reduced compared with today.”

Gavin Brown: Based on the white paper, what percentage of the £6 billion cut in the welfare budget would be reversed in an independent Scotland?

Stewart Maxwell: What I am interested in is the fact that, in their manifestos for the 2016 election, all the parties will have the opportunity to put forward a tax and welfare programme. Gavin Brown's party can do that, we can do it and even the Labour Party might be able to do it.

The fact remains that independence would give the people of Scotland the democratic right to choose the future that they want and the tax and

welfare system that they want, which they cannot do at the moment. We know that the majority of Scots want decisions over welfare and social security to be taken here in Scotland. Only a yes vote will ensure that that happens.

I was interested to read last week's comments by the former Labour MP Brian Wilson, who made a plea to Scots not to vote yes in September because it

"would consign rest of UK to permanent Tory rule".

I have heard that argument repeated several times in Labour circles, but it is, of course, a complete myth. In any case, the idea that it should be up to Scottish voters to save the rest of the UK from the Tories is fundamentally wrong and undemocratic. The people in the rest of the UK have the right to get the Government they vote for—that is what democracy is all about. The irony of Brian Wilson's comments is that they serve only to remind us that a yes vote will ensure that Scots are no longer subjected to policies from Governments that they do not vote for.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Please draw to a close.

Stewart Maxwell: We have 140 days to go. On 18 September, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to grasp this power for future generations, and we should take that opportunity by voting yes.

16:10

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As Annabel Goldie said at the start of the debate, the United Kingdom is a success story. For more than 300 years, it has been a force for good in the world.

We have got used to the separatist campaign for Scottish independence's relentless and negative carping about the UK. Indeed, we have heard lots of that this afternoon from Nicola Sturgeon and others; they constantly repeat nonsense and claims that are entirely without foundation such as our being the fourth most unequal country in the world. However, as we know, the reputation of the United Kingdom as a beacon of freedom, democracy and human rights is high across the world. I gently suggest to SNP members that, as such a beacon, we stand in something of a contrast to the now much admired Russian Federation, even with its now-revived sense of national pride.

Nowhere are we better placed to celebrate the UK's success than when we consider the state of our economy. Because of the hard work and endeavour of millions of men and women across the country, our economy is growing strongly out of recession. The latest growth figures, which were

published only yesterday, showed the fifth consecutive period of GDP growth. We are seeing a sustained and steady recovery and, with manufacturing and construction all registering expansion, a more balanced economy.

Crucially, projections show that the UK economy is likely to be the fastest growing in the western world in coming years. We must not forget that, for the past five years—and, indeed, before that—all that the SNP has been telling us is that the UK economy will never grow and that it will continue to stagnate. As with so much else, it has simply called that wrong.

Clare Adamson: Does the member not agree that, as the speeches this afternoon have indicated, the concern on these benches is about the inequality in the economy, not the size of it?

Murdo Fraser: We should start to celebrate the fact that the economy is doing better, which stands in contrast to all the doom and gloom that we have heard from the SNP benches over the past five years that such a thing would never happen.

Nevertheless, there are threats to the Scottish economy's success. The oil and gas industry has been vital to our economic success in recent decades but, when it met in Aberdeen on Monday, the Parliament's Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee heard about the industry's concerns about the potential transition to independence. Both Professor Alex Kemp of the University of Aberdeen—a man much quoted in this chamber by the First Minister—and Penelope Warne, senior partner of CMS Cameron McKenna, expressed concern about the timescale of a mere 18 months for the transition to independence. With regard to all the work that would have to be done to restructure the tax and regulatory regimes, Professor Kemp said that the timescale was "very, very tight". The crucial point was that the Scottish Government would need to bring in a high level of expertise to set up a new licensing regime and resolve all the issues that would arise, but it was unclear from where that expertise would be drawn.

Penelope Warne told the committee that there are 13,000 treaties affecting the oil and gas sector, each of which would require to be renegotiated. There is simply nobody in the Scottish Government today who has that level of expertise, and it is highly unlikely that staff in the Department of Energy and Climate Change would be interested in relocating to Scotland to do that job. Even if international legal firms had the capacity to provide that level of expertise, it would be available only at very high cost. It would be a veritable gold mine for the lawyers—which, incidentally, is not always a bad thing.

I checked the Scottish Government's white paper to see what it had to say about the transition

to independence for the oil and gas sector, but I struggled to find a single mention about what is a vital question not only for the energy sector but for Scotland's economy more generally. Perhaps Mr Swinney will give us his response to such concerns when he winds up. Where is the expertise to come from? What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the cost and how the expertise will be provided, or are the concerns of experts such as Alex Kemp and Penelope Warne simply to be dismissed as "scaremongering"?

The other great challenge that the oil and gas sector faces is the cost of decommissioning. Who is to pay the sums involved? The Scottish Government believes that some of the liability should fall on Westminster. However, the self-same Scottish ministers say that, in the event of Westminster maintaining its position on the currency union, they would happily default on Scotland's share of the UK national debt. If the Scottish Government were to maintain that foolhardy position, the whole decommissioning costs would fall on the Scottish taxpayer, with most serious consequences.

Scotland's economy is doing well as part of the UK, but our economic recovery is under threat. The SNP cannot answer the most basic questions about the consequences of a yes vote. We can only conclude that only a no vote in the referendum in September will ensure the future of Scotland's economy.

16:15

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Murdo Fraser's contribution was a very selective rewriting of a two-day history—I do not recall it at all.

The motion is a bit like going back to the future. It is a *cri de coeur* for Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom, despite the huge democratic deficit, from supporters who wish to take the UK out of Europe, where there is no such obvious deficit. The danger that will seriously afflict the rest of the UK is not Scottish independence, but a European exit in 2017.

Over the last four days of the recess, I spent some time with my family at Hampton in Surrey. The news is that the UK is already dividing. London and the south-east are on another planet economically, socially and environmentally—and that is not all good. How can the motion realistically claim that the "full union" provides equal opportunity when we have queues at food banks, caps on welfare spending and one of the world's largest gaps in income equality, while the many in the City of London garner bonuses that are equal to 200 per cent of their already significant salaries, the housing bubble has seen

house prices in the south-east rise by 70 per cent over the past 18 months, and we consign people to the streets because they have spare bedrooms?

The stability of the currency is not affected by the UK's exports record, although the UK's construction and manufacturing performances are appalling. Its stability is underpinned by something that is close to home: Scotland's economic performance and the return on its major asset. Even George Osborne demanded a more balanced and export-driven economy for the UK on his trip to Hong Kong.

The claim about the capacity to absorb financial shocks belies the fact—I say this to Annabel Goldie—that Barclays Bank, which is England's largest bank, with debts of £550 billion, was bailed out by American and Qatari interests.

That said, one thing is certain: if we and Westminster continue to fight over the past and the present, we shall lose the future. That is why the case for a future independent Scotland is irrefutable. It will also help the rest of the UK to awaken from its empirical slumber. The democratic rights and the democratic choice of the collective Scottish nation are paramount, whether we are talking about the proposition for democracy, the opportunities for the economy, the attainment of real social justice, the right to communicate internationally or leadership on a serious environmental challenge. In the fulfilment of those things, Scotland can and will be a real success story.

The political proposition will be nowhere more substantiated than when we have a fully representative Government with control over its own affairs. In 2010, the UK coalition Government gained 36 per cent of the Scottish vote. Although 64 per cent of people voted against it, it continues to legislate for large parts of our nation. In 35 of the past 70 years, Scotland has been governed by UK Parliaments that it did not vote for and did not want.

Alex Johnstone: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: No, I will not.

A properly constituted Scottish future requires more than that. Only independence will correct Scotland's democratic deficit and the impact of that deficit. The economic case for independence not only enhances Scotland's argument for independence but shows how it would help to give the remainder of the UK a clearer economic focus.

Time is limited, otherwise I would go on to talk about social justice, the environment and so on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have 40 seconds.

Chic Brodie: I believe that the sabre rattling that goes on tends to hide what there is for us in the future. As we look to the future and write an increasingly successful Scottish story, the only thing that we will consign to history will be the treaty of union, which was meant to be a working union agreement between two nations—it was certainly not a takeover.

16:20

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): In many of the speeches in the debate, we have heard a lot of understandable anger about the state of the United Kingdom and unfairness. Truth be told, many of the arguments that have been made are not really of interest to people who have always been Scottish nationalists, because their view is that Scotland is better off out of the United Kingdom, irrespective of whether or not the United Kingdom is doing well. Their argument is that Scotland would be better off out of the UK, irrespective of the colour of the Government in power at Westminster. The arguments about what we currently perceive as unfairness or differences in wealth in different parts of the country are irrelevant to people who are fundamentally Scottish nationalists.

Patrick Harvie: I would like Mr Henry at least to acknowledge that the breadth of the independence movement as it now stands takes it far beyond the group of people whom he defines as dyed-in-the-wool Nationalists with a capital “N”. Is it not much broader?

Hugh Henry: Patrick Harvie makes the point for me that many people who now espouse a vote for separation have never been fundamentally Scottish nationalists. For a range of reasons, they now happen to think that breaking away from the United Kingdom will cure some of the perceived unevenness or unfairness. Malcolm Chisholm made the point in his speech that this is not about changing the colour of the Government, but about fundamentally changing the relationship once and for all. People should know that, if they wake up and realise at some point in the future that they have made a mistake or that what was promised is not being delivered, there is no going back.

We have heard a lot about one aspect in a number of speeches. Nicola Sturgeon talked about “bluff and bluster”; John Mason asked, quite rightly, whether the motion was based on “evidence” or “assertion” and said that he wants facts and information; and Bruce Crawford condemned what he described as “rambling assertions”. The problem is that we are being asked to vote on whether to leave the United Kingdom on the basis of bluster, bluff and assertions.

I have asked many questions of the Scottish Government, but most of the answers that I get refer me back to other questions that have been answered. When I go to those questions, I see that there was no answer to them either, and that they refer back elsewhere. Alternatively, I am referred to the so-called white paper, which is long on words and short on actual detail.

What is it that we are being asked to decide on? We are being asked to accept the assertions of the Scottish Government on EU membership, even though Viviane Reding, the vice-president of the European Commission, has said that an independent Scotland would have to apply as a new member state. That is not good enough for the Scottish Government, which asks us to accept the assertions of Alex Salmond and his colleagues. We are being asked to accept their assertions on whether Scotland would have to join the euro. We are being asked to accept their assertions that the pound sterling would continue, irrespective of what others have got to say about that.

We are also being asked to accept the Scottish Government’s assertions, with no guarantees and none of the evidence that John Mason wants, on the continuation of a European rebate. There is no evidence whatsoever that, if Scotland became an independent member of the European Union, the rebate would continue and all the other member states in the European Union would vote for it.

We are being asked to accept the Scottish Government’s assertions about the ability to levy tuition fees on English students. We are being asked to accept its assertions that, if Scotland had a more liberal immigration policy than the rest of the United Kingdom, there would be no border, irrespective of huge differences between the two countries. We are being asked to accept its assertions on research council funding, with no evidence and no guarantees. We are being asked to accept its evidence on cross-border pensions and the filling in of the black hole.

Fundamentally, we are being asked to make a decision about ripping up the constitutional structure of this country and leaving the United Kingdom, with no evidence presented, no back-up and no guarantees. It is all bluff and bluster from Alex Salmond and his colleagues. This is fundamentally a pig-in-a-poke referendum.

16:25

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Less than a week ago, it felt as though the whole of Scotland was on its feet applauding Jim Sillars, who delivered Margo MacDonald’s message to us that, in this debate, we can treat one another as opponents, but we must not treat one another as

enemies. I am very pleased that, for the most part, today's debate has been focused on the arguments and has contained less of the personal hostility that we are sometimes guilty of. If we achieve that tone in our debate for the next few months, we will be of far more use to Scotland, regardless of the decision that the voters choose.

I apologise for missing the first couple of sentences of Annabel Goldie's opening speech, but I heard clearly from her the story of what she calls success in the UK. Our argument is simply one about what success looks like. Annabel Goldie may look at the City of London, for instance, and see something that is successful. She might call it a "powerhouse of the UK economy", perhaps. I look at it and see a culture of greed that I can only describe as a moral failure as well as an economic failure.

I look at a Government that is prepared to cut taxes for the richest and benefits for the poorest, and I see that as a record of failure. Some people would call sustained periods of economic growth under any Government success, but I see the proceeds of that growth mostly benefiting those who need it the least, with the social and environmental costs of growth being heaped on those who can least well defend themselves from them, and I see a record of failure.

Hugh Henry: Patrick Harvie has been consistent in his condemnation of the culture in the City of London. He mentioned Margo MacDonald, who will be missed by us all. Would he agree that at least she was logical in many of her arguments? For example, on the currency, she argued that, if Scotland became an independent state, there should be a separate Scottish currency. Would he also agree that, if there is a separate Scottish state, Scots should have the right to decide whether they remain part of the European Union?

Patrick Harvie: Scots certainly have the right to make democratic decisions of all kinds. Mr Henry knows that I am open to the arguments for a Scottish currency. The SNP is in government, and it has a right to advocate for its view, too.

Annabel Goldie also made an argument about Scottish influence. I was a wee bit astonished that she chose to highlight Trident as part of that argument. I understand the transition that many people made from supporting unilateral disarmament to supporting multilateral disarmament. She may not have been on that particular journey, but she made the case for multilateral disarmament, despite the fact that it is the precise opposite of the UK Government's current proposal, which is for unilateral rearmament.

I have advocated a minority position on many debates in my time—I am in the Green Party, after

all—and I respect anyone who can stick to their guns, if I may use a weaponised metaphor. Annabel Goldie should recognise that, in the case of Scotland's view—that of Scotland's MSPs and MPs and wider public opinion in Scotland—support for the renewal of Trident is a minority position. It is simply not credible to say that Scotland has influence on the position when we are getting the policy that most Scots do not want.

Annabel Goldie: I tried to pose a reasoned argument and I understand the sensitivities that surround Trident, but I ask Mr Harvie how simply removing Trident from Scotland and placing it anywhere else would contribute to any discussion about nuclear disarmament.

Patrick Harvie: First, the position is morally credible. If we oppose nuclear weapons, we should not host them or join a nuclear alliance. Secondly, it would force the UK to re-evaluate its decision about who will be lumbered with these morally offensive weapons of mass murder.

Annabel Goldie said that she is not ready to jack in the union jack. I say to that, "Quite right." Britishness and Scottishness as cultural identities are not under threat. The cultural identity of Scottishness is not under threat in the current constitutional settlement, and the cultural identity of Britishness will not be under threat. I am not motivated by flags on either side but, to those for whom their national identity is meaningful, I say that their identity is not under threat.

I look forward to Scotland moving forward with confidence in the event of a yes vote and to all of us continuing to treat one another perhaps as opponents but never as enemies.

16:31

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): As with my colleague Bruce Crawford, my family's links to the British armed forces sprang to mind during Annabel Goldie's speech. My grandfather fought in world war two with the Gordon Highlanders tank regiment in Burma. If he were still alive, he would vote yes in September.

The debate should focus on Scotland's future and not Scotland's past. However, I could not help but wonder why Annabel Goldie chose to focus on Scotland's regiments when the regiment that my grandfather served in was disbanded by the Conservative Party. Since that happened, UK Governments have disbanded many other Scottish regiments in the face of opposition from not just those who served in those regiments but those who were elected in Scotland and wider Scottish civic society.

Annabel Goldie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: I might come back to Annabel Goldie later.

Following what Patrick Harvie said, that is another example of Scotland's opinion appearing to count for little in Westminster's decision.

I think that most people on the no side of the debate now accept that Scotland is a wealthy nation that can afford to be independent. However, I suggest that Malcolm Chisholm—who spoke about independence being

“a nightmare from which we would never awake”—

has started trying a bit too hard to convince others of his position. Perhaps he has decided that he needs to do that.

I was interested that Hanzala Malik said that he would understand the debate if we were having it in an African nation or a third-world nation, rather than a prosperous society such as Scotland. It strikes me as odd that independence appears to be okay for the nations of Africa that chose to declare it but that it would somehow be wrong for Scotland to take that position.

Hanzala Malik: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: I give Mr Malik an opportunity to clarify his remarks.

Hanzala Malik: I, too, took the oath to serve Queen and country in the Royal Engineer regiment. We have all done our bit and played our part. I would never hesitate to give my life for my country.

The member does not seem to understand the difference: in African nations, a lot of people lost their lives. I hope that we will not lose a lot of lives, but we will lose something that is precious and dear to us—our history of working together as one nation.

Mark McDonald: Mr Malik identifies—correctly—that the independence debate and the movement towards Scottish self-determination are almost unique in having taken place without the conflict and bloodshed that have occurred all too often in other independence movements. That is to the great credit of Scotland and the wider UK in framing the debate.

However, for other nations out there—many of which declared their independence from London— independence was and continues to be right for them. No nation that has declared its independence and become an independent nation has ever gone back to the nation from which it declared independence and said, “I think we've made a mistake. We'd like to come back.” They face the challenges of the future as independent countries and take responsibility for the decisions that they make.

Some of the arguments that have been deployed in this debate and in the wider debate deserve to be touched on. I will leave the Trident argument because Patrick Harvie has demolished that quite successfully.

Murdo Fraser said that the UK serves as a “beacon of ... human rights” throughout the globe. He should tell the homosexual African asylum seekers who are being deported by the Home Office that the UK is a beacon of human rights.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: I have only 30 seconds left.

It has been argued that if we became independent, we would turn family members who live elsewhere on these islands into foreigners. That argument is offensive for two reasons. First, it uses foreigner as a pejorative term and assumes that a foreigner is something to be afraid of. Secondly, I have family who are Canadian and live in Canada. They are my family first and foremost, and my love for them is not diminished by their geographical location, nor will my love for my friends and family south of the border be diminished in the event of Scottish independence. In future, can we please ensure that such arguments are no longer used in this debate?

Finally, because I took quite a long intervention—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. You must close. I am really sorry. Thank you, notwithstanding that.

We move to the closing speeches. I call Jenny Marra, who has up to six minutes.

16:36

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Consider a people saying “No”. Throughout history, many people have said no to Governments. That is the precious prize of democracy. People say no to Governments when that Government oversteps the boundary of what people want their country to be. To say no is a brave and considered reaction to Governments that propose ideas without popular support. To say no is the natural language of protest and it is a radical response.

It is what comes after that no that will define us. A no vote in September will be a positive and confident decision to stay part of the United Kingdom—a yes to being part of a bigger family of nations and a positive reassertion of popular support for devolution, which will allow Scots to make the decisions that matter to all of us. Nevertheless, it leaves us with questions to answer on 19 September. We need to answer the

call for change in our communities, because most analyses would say that there is not a desperate cry for a referendum on independence. They would say that the SNP simply won an overall majority in this session of Parliament.

Even if we look at it differently, and say that the referendum is happening because people are dissatisfied with their lives—many are—that leaves us, on 19 September, in the event of a no vote, with a big challenge: how to make people's lives better. I truly believe there is a greater opportunity to start that process of change in September inside the United Kingdom; to start, on that day, to reshape Scotland—our country—inside the UK.

Our challenges, in this country, are not specifically Scottish. Unemployment, persistent youth unemployment and child poverty, and the fuel poverty that stems from those, are shared by other post-industrial European economies. Those problems vary. Spain has twice the rate of youth unemployment that we face, but our health in Scotland is markedly worse than that of our European neighbours. However, the fundamental economic challenges of declining industry and manufacturing are not born of or in Scotland, but are born of developing economies and cheaper labour markets.

The manufacturer of automated teller machines did not leave my home city for Hungary because Scotland is in the UK; it left because labour costs are lower in eastern Europe. That will not be solved if Scotland leaves the United Kingdom. There are no easy answers, but a transformational start for our country in September would be to radically improve our infrastructure—our rail, air links and capacity—such as dualling the A9 to open up our Highland economy.

How, though, do we fund that in the current stultified climate of debate that the Scottish Government has set, in which everything must be free? Can we really honestly expect to innovate, change and transform without properly paying for it?

Mark McDonald: Will Jenny Marra give way?

Jenny Marra: No.

There is no good evidence that an independent Scotland would have a greater tax take, so a yes vote will not provide for that.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: No—I have a lot to get through today.

We need to reform our health service radically. Our poor health holds back our wellbeing and our economy. Obesity, diabetes, heart disease, alcohol addiction and cancer must be tackled. Two

thirds of our health budget is spent on diagnosing and treating illness. We should be focusing on preventative spend, turning the situation on its head and investing in large-scale alteration of diets and activities. Can we honestly expect to continue in the same health patterns and improve our health record and economy?

Those are the most important challenges facing us—not the constitution. I also include education in that. I recently heard of a secondary school in my region where 40 per cent of the first years had a reading and writing age of primary 2. That is a disgrace. Literacy is the greatest gift that we can give to our children. We pride ourselves on Scottish education, but we need to ask some hard questions.

There is, in the Scottish Government's white paper, no agenda such as the one that I have outlined. The SNP tries to make the case that it has a social-democratic agenda for Scotland, but it has no track record, no analysis and no solid commitment on redistribution and equality. Its only tax pledge is a cut in corporation tax, which has also been blown apart today.

The white paper is stark in its lack of ambition. The only progressive ideas on childcare and gender quotas are things that the Labour Party has been calling for in this chamber for months. The living wage is the latest litmus test of the SNP's commitment to redistributive politics. This week, an EU spokesperson confirmed what I told the Deputy First Minister in this chamber last week, which is that there is no legal barrier to the living wage becoming a stipulation of contracts. So, what is she doing about it now? This morning, Scottish and Southern Energy told me that it is demanding that all its new contractors pay the living wage to their workers. The Deputy First Minister might like to note that the European Union law that governs the energy markets is extremely similar to the public procurement rules.

I hope that the Deputy First Minister will prove me wrong and prove that the SNP has a social-democratic vision for Scotland. However, the populist policies of nationalism do not allow it. I hope that she proves me wrong and gives the Scottish workers a May day living wage this year.

16:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Annabel Goldie set a good tone at the start of this debate by giving her perspective of the world and the role of the United Kingdom within that world. As she will appreciate, it is a view with which I have fundamental disagreements. For example, I do not think that the United Kingdom is universally respected across the globe for its

involvement in the illegal war in Iraq, which the United Kingdom Government of the time delivered for us. I think that it did fundamental damage on the international stage to the credibility of the United Kingdom in respect of how it takes such decisions. I, for one, was profoundly opposed to the illegal action that was undertaken by the United Kingdom Government.

The point was reinforced by my colleague Bruce Crawford, in a fantastic speech to Parliament today, which crystallised some of the issues that many members of the public will be wrestling with as they consider the issues around the referendum. Many of them feel loyalties towards the United Kingdom—which Annabel Goldie expressed—because of history, common practice and involvement in shared institutions, but they are interested in, and want to be persuaded of the arguments about, why it is in the interests of the people of Scotland to take control of their own affairs through the independence referendum.

In a sense, the contrast between Bruce Crawford's speech and Annabel Goldie's speech was helpful to members of the public, because they will have seen two distinguished parliamentarians wrestling with the issue of how we should analyse our long-standing and historic connections as part of the United Kingdom. Bruce Crawford clearly mapped out how individuals, despite the depth of their connections with the United Kingdom, could take a view that it is right and proper and effective for our country to take control of its own affairs through a yes vote in the referendum.

There was also a fundamental contradiction in some of the arguments in the debate. For me, Willie Rennie put the argument's greatest point of contradiction. He said—he will forgive me if I do not quote him exactly, but he expressed sentiments of this type, as I am sure he would confirm—that he was proud that we had all built the national health service together in the United Kingdom. If we are proud that we built the national health service together, why did we in Scotland decide that it is essential that we have exclusive 100 per cent control over its future in Scotland? That is what we have as a consequence of devolution; we have control to decide what type of national health service we want, what direction we want it to take and what reforms we want it to undertake. By virtue of that, we have expressly decided not to go down the route of fragmentation and competition that the United Kingdom Government is pursuing.

Willie Rennie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: If Mr Rennie will forgive me, I will finish my argument.

If we have a shared heritage in building up an institution as fundamentally significant to every one of us as the national health service, and having decided as a people in 1997 that we should exercise 100 per cent democratic control over the future of the national health service in Scotland on our terms, why should we not exercise such control over other issues that are of significance to the future of our country?

Willie Rennie: The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth seems to indicate that everything either must be centralised or independent. We believe that there is a beauty in devolution: the people closest to the ground make decisions where that is appropriate, but we can also share in the benefits of the United Kingdom—all the things that he argues should continue, such as the currency, the energy market and all the other great things about the UK. Surely he is the one who is contradicting himself.

John Swinney: I am not. I will come on to talk about a couple of the other fundamental issues that we should be able to determine and that are of great importance to the choices that people make.

I want us to be able to make different choices about defence expenditure. I do not want Scotland to be associated with investing in the next generation of Trident nuclear missiles; I want to take a different course of action to the United Kingdom. I believe that to be important because I would rather spend the money that it is proposed should be spent on Trident nuclear missiles, as part of the United Kingdom's defence budget, on measures that will tackle the long-term intergenerational inequality that has persisted in Scotland throughout my entire lifetime; that will transform our people's economic prospects. That choice is important for the people of Scotland, but we cannot take it democratically in this Parliament because the power rests with the United Kingdom Government.

Malcolm Chisholm: The white paper says that all that money should also be spent on alternative defence expenditure. Is not the real answer to the cabinet secretary's supposed contradiction that we want the best of both worlds? Will he not acknowledge any benefits that we get from being a member of the United Kingdom?

John Swinney: I am sorry, but I do not know what has happened to Malcolm Chisholm. I used to listen to him telling us about the importance of getting our priorities right in the choices that we make. I cannot believe that he would put a higher premium on the Trident expenditure than on tackling the fundamental equality that exists in Scotland. As a matter of white-paper fact, we say that we would spend less, to the tune of

£500 million, on defence than is currently allocated to Scotland.

The second issue that is of importance is the bedroom tax. By 108 votes to 15, the Parliament voted for my seventh budget back in February. The issue that brought the Labour Party together with the Liberals, the Greens, the independents and my party colleagues—but not the Conservatives—was the money that we were prepared to put into the budget to mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax in Scotland. There is clearly a different democratic attitude and intent towards that welfare policy in Scotland; we should be able to exercise that power over the whole of welfare expenditure.

Alex Johnstone: In her opening remarks, the Deputy First Minister appeared to make a £6 billion spending commitment. Before he ends his speech, will the cabinet secretary tell us what that meant and what it will cost in additional taxation?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In your remaining 40 seconds, please.

John Swinney: The Deputy First Minister was saying that the Conservative and Liberal Government is making £6 billion of cuts to welfare expenditure in the UK, which affects Scotland, and people should be aware of the attitude and moral values of the Conservative Government as a consequence.

In his contribution, Mr Rowley said that he had a different vision from that of David Cameron, and I quite understand and totally accept that. However, like everyone else in the better together campaign, Mr Rowley seems to be prepared to accept that it is for Mr Cameron to exercise political leadership over this country. I do not want Tory choices to be inflicted on the people of Scotland; I want us to take our own decisions here, in Scotland.

16:50

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I begin by returning the compliments that Nicola Sturgeon so graciously offered me recently. Her performance today was—how can I put this?—characteristically Ceausescu-esque in its abrasive combativeness. Equally characteristically, it was devoid of any verifiable substance. It was yet another depressingly empty litany of grievance and nationalist assertions, all of which are now, to borrow the SNP vernacular, rocks melting in the sun.

Her amendment this afternoon—dear, dear—articulates the most depressing and downcast vision for an independent Scotland that I have yet heard articulated. It positively relishes the prospect of a population wholly dependent on welfare being

handed down from an SNP Government. It contains no entrepreneurial ambition for Scotland's economy or its people. Future generations can look forward to depleted oil revenues funding welfare, not to a modern, expansionist economy that creates jobs. It contains no ambition for Scotland's wider role in the world and no ambition for wider cultural success. It articulates just a future of isolationist state dependency. Read it!

She made her democracy point this afternoon. Kevin Stewart said that 1979 was ancient history, but Nicola Sturgeon's amendment chooses 1945 as a point of reference. Even so, that barely illustrates her position. Why not look at Governments over the past 100 years, which will show that her proposition is arguable in just 36 of those 100 years? In any event, it is an argument that any part of the United Kingdom could have made in the face of the outcome of different general elections over the past century—in England, for example, between 1964 and 1966, or between 1974 and 1979, or between 2005 and 2010. It is an argument that could be made repeatedly in Wales, and it could be made after each and every general election that has ever been held in Northern Ireland. Yet all those countries and all those peoples understand the strength that comes from pooling our resources and working in partnership with the most enduring and successful of unions.

In any event, it was precisely that imbalance that the devolved Scottish Parliament was established to address. The Scottish Parliament confers on the Scottish Government powers that, for all the SNP's griping and grievance, it declines to use. It could act on child payments now, but it chooses not to. If the best the SNP can muster in support of an independent Scotland is some lurid anti-Tory or anti-Liberal Democrat rant, then it can do its worst. It might be the basis of an SNP party conference love-in performance from the Deputy First Minister, but it is hardly a basis on which to separate from the United Kingdom or to ask the people of Scotland to take a huge risk on a vulnerable new nation.

Annabel Goldie set out the positive case for the United Kingdom in a masterful speech. She set out the broad range of positive interaction between Scotland and the UK, and the contribution that has been made by Scotland with the rest of the UK in the economic, international, and defence spheres. Several members said that there is no practical illustration of Scotland influencing the UK internationally, so I will give one.

During last year's Syria crisis, Scotland was deeply influential. In the House of Commons vote on military action, the decision not to proceed militarily was taken by a majority of just 13. That

majority included the votes of 45 Scottish MPs who voted no. Scotland influenced the outcome of the United Kingdom's view on Syria, and because of that, the Senate and Congress of the United States paused and altered their policy. Any vote in an independent Scotland would have changed nothing. The votes of Scots at Westminster changed the response of the western world. *[Interruption.]* It is an irrefutable fact: the 45 votes of Scottish MPs affected the outcome of that vote. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order. Can we settle down a bit?

Jackson Carlaw: Nicola Sturgeon's response to all that was that she would rather end child poverty than have a seat in the United Nations, yet it is precisely that seat in the United Nations that allows the United Kingdom to influence policies that influence child poverty across the world. With independence we would not influence child poverty or influence affairs in the rest of the world—nor would we have a secure or strong economy with which to do either.

Drew Smith made a powerful, focused and measured speech that talked directly to the issues. Willie Rennie demolished the SNP welfare case. He made the point that 98 per cent of the reforms that have been implemented are to be accepted by the SNP. I recall Nicola Sturgeon coming to the Health and Sport Committee at the beginning of this parliamentary session and saying that she fully supported the principles of welfare reform. Now we understand why: she intends to implement 98 per cent of it. She is shamelessly using the fears of many about welfare changes to market her agenda on independence, with no intention of matching her words with financial commitments, as Gavin Brown ably demonstrated when he challenged the Government to say which of the welfare reforms it would finance differently. Then the SNP went quiet and speechless when Willie Rennie was able to quote the conclusions of the report by Professor Leslie Young that Nicola Sturgeon cited.

Malcolm Chisholm understands what the SNP does not: the consequences of the vote on this referendum will outlast this, any and all future Conservative Governments. It was a devastating critique from him of the economic experts who give evidence to this Parliament.

We may not be at the end of this long, seemingly never-ending referendum battle, but neither are we, as was once said, at the end of the beginning; we are at the beginning of the end. In a speech to the House of Commons on independence, almost 25 years ago to the day, Alex Salmond boasted that opinion polls showed that his cause was on the march. Indeed, quite carried away by the occasion as he was, he added

a characteristic flourish, saying that opinion polls revealed that 62 per cent of Scots were at that time in favour of independence in Europe.

Oh dear. From such giddy heights, the opinion poll facts for a generation since have demonstrated one clear and opposite truth. The majority of Scots, the silent majority of ordinary Scots, if you will, remain committed to a Scotland within the United Kingdom. They are the silent majority of Scottish students in votes at the University of Strathclyde, at the University of Glasgow and at Glasgow Caledonian University, and the silent majority of first-time voters in votes in schools in Aberdeenshire and, in the last month, at Millburn academy, Orkney high school, Forres academy, Kinlochleven high, Hazelhead academy, Harlaw academy, Ross high and Craigmount high.

Alex Johnstone: More!

Murdo Fraser: More!

Jackson Carlaw: It is the silent majority of men, women, trade unionists, nurses and other workers in our public services, of workers in the shipyards on the Clyde, of employees of independently owned retail and manufacturing companies across Scotland, and companies such as Clyde Blowers—whatever their Monaco-based bosses may think.

Instead of purring with delight over Kremlin approval for Alex Salmond, the silent majority of Scots would rather purr with satisfaction at standing tall in a United Kingdom; standing tall for its values as articulated by Annabel Goldie; not the values of a former Soviet apparatchik, but the tried, tested and consistent values of a union that stood firmly for democratic change across the continent that Mr Salmond's favourite apparatchik once mastered.

The silent majority will have the confidence to firmly stare down the boggle-eyed, messianic, evangelical door knockers who regularly cast their bile on the United Kingdom and all that it has achieved.

Whatever their individual political allegiances or inclinations, they are the silent majority of Scots who believe that this union is equally our union, who can vote for Scotland, uniquely, to be the only nation in that union to have voted to be there; for a Scotland standing taller, more confident and ready to embrace further the devolved responsibility that all those political parties that oppose independence are committed to delivering. That commitment was questioned, but it was given by both Ed Miliband and the Prime Minister. The one thing that this constitutional debate has sparked is an acceptance and a desire for more devolved powers for this Scottish Parliament when we vote no in September.

The silent majority are making a positive affirmation of our confidence and willingness to progress, not just as an enlightened and better Scotland, but as an even better Scotland still—a Scotland in partnership with and at the heart of the United Kingdom. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. [*Applause.*] Wheesh! That concludes the debate on Scotland's future.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09853, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 6 May 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The National Youth Work Strategy, Our ambitions for improving the life chances of young people in Scotland

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Wildlife Crime, Eradicating raptor persecution from Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 May 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Infrastructure, Investment and Cities;
Culture and External Affairs

followed by Scottish Green Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 May 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Care and Caring

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Life Sciences

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 13 May 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 May 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Education and Lifelong Learning
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 May 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.30 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09854, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for stage 2 of the Defective and Dangerous Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Defective and Dangerous Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 13 June 2014.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-09855, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S4M-09856, on deadlines for lodging First Minister's questions and portfolio, general and topical questions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Young People's Involvement in Education and Training (Provision of Information) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the period for members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on 8 May should end at 4.30 pm on 1 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on 14 and 15 May should end at 12 noon on 2 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on 6 May should be 9.30 am on 6 May.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are up to five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on Scotland's future, if the amendment in the name of Nicola Sturgeon is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Drew Smith falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-09844.3, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09844, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on Scotland's future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Drew Smith therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-09844, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on Scotland's future, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the independence referendum is scheduled to take place in just over four-and-a-half months; is proud of the fact that Scotland enters this period recognised globally as an open, tolerant and inclusive nation; agrees that only independence will guarantee Scotland governments that reflect the views of its people on all matters; notes that for 35 of the 69 years since 1945, Scotland has been governed by UK administrations with no electoral mandate in Scotland; regrets that decisions taken by the UK Government will remove £6 billion in welfare payments from Scotland, especially from its most vulnerable families, resulting in up to 100,000 more children living in poverty; agrees that an independent Scotland would, per person, be one of the wealthiest nations in the developed world and that Scotland can more than afford to be an independent country, and notes that Scotland spends less of both its GDP and public revenues on social protection than the UK as a whole and that, with independence, the people of Scotland would have the power to abolish the so-called bedroom tax, halt the introduction of universal credit and the personal independence payment, build a welfare system based on principles of dignity, respect and fairness and would have the opportunity to grow Scotland's economy to its full potential, harness its natural resources and make Scotland a more equal and socially just society.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09855, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Young People's Involvement in Education and Training (Provision of Information) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09856, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on deadlines for lodging First Minister's questions and portfolio, general and topical questions, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on 8 May should end at 4.30 pm on 1 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on 14 and 15 May should end at 12 noon on 2 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on 6 May should be 9.30 am on 6 May.

Historic Institutional Child Abuse

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-09525, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice for survivors of historic institutional child abuse. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the continuing efforts of survivors of historic institutional child abuse, including those in South Scotland, to access justice; recognises that many survivors continue to suffer from the legacy of the abuse that they experienced; believes that, while some steps have been taken to address historic child abuse, much more needs to be done; notes the deliberations of the Public Petitions Committee in its consideration of Petition PE1351, Time for all to be heard, since it was lodged in August 2010; welcomes the publication by the Scottish Human Rights Commission of its *Action Plan on Justice for Victims of Historic Abuse of Children in Care*; notes that the main aims of the action plan are to achieve acknowledgement and accountability for historical institutional child abuse; further notes that a number of options exist for improving accountability, including a full public inquiry, the establishment of a survivors' support fund and tackling the barrier of the time bar in allowing survivors access to justice, and notes calls for action to improve support for survivors of historic institutional child abuse and allow them access to justice.

17:06

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I thank you for the opportunity to bring the debate to the chamber. I welcome back the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, who was absent last week due to illness; it is good to have her back in the chamber.

There can be no duty more important for civil society than to deliver on its responsibility for ensuring that children who are placed in the care of institutions—whether those are local authority, religious or charitable institutions—receive the love, care, support, protection and security that they deserve. It is a matter of record that society failed in that duty, and past evidence allows for no doubt in that regard.

In 2003, the European Court of Human Rights commented, in the case of *E and Others v United Kingdom*, that the remedies for survivors in Scotland were inadequate. I do not imagine that any comments from a review at present would be significantly different.

Institutional abuse of children is the ultimate example of failure in a duty of care and Government, as the agency that sets the standard, creates rules and laws and measures outcomes, has final responsibility for the matter.

My reason for initiating the debate is to give a voice to those survivors who have suffered, over

years and sometimes decades, the most horrific abuse at the hands of people whose sworn duty it was to protect them. One survivor, who had for decades sought a meaningful apology and specialist counselling and support, contacted me about his case. His story was not only moving, but in the end devastating. On his behalf, I made contact with the organisation concerned to seek assistance. I was referred to a lawyer. In that moment, I experienced the coldness and alienation that is felt so strongly by so many survivors.

I do not know—and nor does the Government—the number of victims who have been affected by abuse at the hands of those who work in children's care establishments. Some of them have committed suicide. The number quoted for Northern Ireland is 434; I imagine that Scotland will not have any fewer survivors, and it probably has more. Northern Ireland has initiated a public inquiry, which is designed to be inquisitorial rather than adversarial in its approach. It sets out not only to respond to the experience of victims—who are now survivors—but to ensure that such abuse does not occur again, and that services are in place to deal with the challenges.

In 2004, Jack McConnell—to his credit—gave a Government apology to victims on behalf of the Scottish people. That was a substantial step in beginning a process to deal with the many issues raised by survivors that should have been addressed before. Survivors wanted appropriate prosecutions where possible, and forthright apologies from the right people. They needed professional support and counselling, and in some cases appropriate damages. Lord McConnell's apology, although welcomed by many survivors across Scotland and supported by the general public, did not deliver accountability in relation to individual institutions, nor did it provide an effective apology to survivors in respect of their individual cases.

Perhaps an apology law such as that which has been suggested by Margaret Mitchell might go some way to freeing up an opportunity for bodies finally to come forward and deal with the shortcomings in a more open fashion. At the same time, the minister should comment on current practice in relation to time bars that are applied in our civil courts in respect of on-going cases involving historic abuse.

To date, survivors do not feel that their needs have been addressed in a positive and practical fashion. It is estimated that £6.2 million has been spent on creating the national confidential forum and on funding various inquiries, reviews and debates that have come and gone. Survivors feel that little has changed in order to deal with the

questions that they have consistently asked. The motion seeks to reflect that frustration.

Survivors want to see an effective response from the Government and the many agencies that are responsible for this shame. No survivor has asked me for compensation; all, however, want to receive a meaningful apology and, if appropriate, a prosecution. Most important, they seek psychological support and help in dealing with their private nightmares.

There is no doubt that this is a difficult issue. It is one that I personally find almost overwhelming. We have a responsibility to answer the demands of survivors clearly and simply. If there is to be no response akin to the public inquiry in Northern Ireland, will the minister explain why? Will the Government reconsider its decision now? Will the minister explain simply where the Government is today on meeting the demands of survivors? She knows that survivors have little trust in the provisions that are currently in place to deal with the issue. In the opinion of survivors, those provisions are convoluted, bureaucratic and bound to fail. They need a response.

I know that a number of members have participated in the debate and have long made efforts on the issue. I am fresh to the subject and make no claim to any special contribution. I merely ask the minister on behalf of those who have suffered abuse—some of whom are in the public gallery tonight—and who are still very much those children in our care: when do we play our part to help them to survive?

In the debate in December 2004, Kenny MacAskill said:

"There are none so blind as those who will not see and none so deaf as those who will not hear."—[*Official Report*, 1 December 2004; c 12438.]

Will we learn the lessons today, use our sight and our hearing and answer the cries from victims for support and an effective response? I look forward to hearing other members' speeches.

17:13

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank Graeme Pearson for securing this debate on justice for the survivors of historic institutional child abuse. It is a harrowing subject, as has been said, and such abuse has an everlasting effect on its victims. I have been involved with the issue in the Scottish Parliament since Chris Daly and others brought a petition to the Public Petitions Committee in 2002. As a member of the committee, I was involved in the evidence sessions on the subject. I was proud of the way in which the petition was presented to the committee, the evidence that was given and the way in which it was listened to.

I concur with Graeme Pearson's comments, but I am also proud of what we have achieved so far. I am proud of the fact that the petition, which dealt with a very serious subject, became one of the first Public Petitions Committee petitions to be debated in the Scottish Parliament, and that that resulted, as Graeme Pearson said, in an apology by the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, on behalf of all the people of Scotland. That had never happened before and it highlighted a horrific ongoing situation. The petition resulted in the time to be heard pilot forum; that approach had never been taken before. All members in the Parliament should be proud not only about how we dealt with the issue, but about the fact that we now have a national confidential forum.

Graeme Pearson mentioned the apology law, and I know that Margaret Mitchell will concentrate on that in her speech. He also mentioned the time bar issue, which is referred to in the motion. That is something that we can look at that. In addition, Graeme Pearson touched on compensation. In speaking to the petitioners, as well as to constituents of mine who have unfortunately been through such horrific experiences, I found that they did not seek monetary compensation; rather, they wanted recognition of what they had been through and of the fact that someone, somewhere is responsible.

I am glad that the Scottish Human Rights Commission has taken the issue on board. It has provided a very good briefing paper on what it is doing and the discussions that are taking place in the forum. I am a member of the Justice Committee, which is the lead committee on the issue, although the Health and Sport Committee examined the national confidential forum. I am sure that the matter will return to the Justice Committee and that we will look into the national confidential forum and what has been said about it.

I hope that we can move on from this terrible situation. The people who I have spoken to want closure, but at the end of the day they really want justice. They believe that they deserve justice; everyone in this Parliament believes that they deserve justice. Therefore, the issue is how we deliver that justice.

Once again, I thank Graeme Pearson for securing the debate, because he has allowed us to consider the matter. I look forward to the forthcoming speeches and the minister's response.

17:17

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Graeme Pearson on securing the debate and welcome the opportunity to speak on

the important issue of childhood sexual abuse. Remaining silent about this harrowing issue, often because it is just too hard to talk about, benefits no one except the perpetrators, so the more the issue is discussed and highlighted, the more it helps survivors and deters perpetrators.

The unpalatable truth is that the perpetrator is likely to be in a position of trust and/or known to the family or even to be a family member rather than a stranger. It is a cruel irony that children who were placed in care homes for their own wellbeing and safety became victims of institutional abuse. It is difficult to imagine anything worse than the trust of a child being betrayed so grotesquely by the very people from whom they have a right to expect to be there to protect them, whether that is in a family or an institutional setting.

From the very first meeting of the cross-party group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse that I attended in 2003 and ever since, I have never failed to be moved and humbled by the extraordinary courage of adult survivors. As the motion states, all survivors, including survivors of historic institutional child abuse, continue to suffer from the legacy of that dreadful abuse. I fully understand that for them acknowledgment of the abuse having taken place and achieving justice is an important aspect in moving on from such abuse.

The national strategy for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which was developed out of the efforts of the cross-party group, is just one example of an important achievement that benefits abuse survivors. Furthermore, in its "Action Plan on Justice for Victims of Historic Abuse of Children in Care", the Scottish Human Rights Commission notes:

"The time bar is a real barrier to survivors getting access to civil justice."

That point has been made consistently over the years by the cross-party group, which opposes the time bar and has made its view known to the Government and relevant legal bodies.

Furthermore, the convictions that have been secured in the Max Clifford trial serve as a timely reminder that the time bar should not be an obstacle to survivors who seek justice. Therefore, eliminating the time bar would be one way of allowing justice to be achieved for survivors of historic abuse.

Many survivors of institutional abuse experienced the traumas of physical violence, emotional abuse and neglect in addition to sexual abuse. Those experiences combine to produce particular shame and fear of not being believed, which prevent many victims from coming forward until years later. Survivors might also have

memory problems as a result of great trauma that they suffered in childhood.

Although I fully understand and sympathise with those survivors who have called for a public inquiry, opinion among survivors is mixed. In such an inquiry, survivors would be exposed, and many do not wish it to be known that they have a history of being abused. Furthermore, given that inquiries have been carried out into child abuse in children's homes in Edinburgh and Fife, in addition to the Kerelaw inquiry, it is difficult to see what yet another very expensive inquiry would reveal that those inquiries have not. Therefore, I am not convinced that that is the best way forward.

Instead, I believe that the money would be better spent on helping to ensure that the plethora of agencies that support and advocate for abuse survivors are adequately resourced. Such organisations, which include the Kingdom Abuse Survivors Project and the Falkirk-based Open Secret, operate throughout Scotland. They have helped to raise awareness of the issue and have brought healing, strength, courage and assistance to abuse survivors.

The Scottish Human Rights Commission's action plan advocates that Scotland should adopt apologies legislation to facilitate acknowledgment of and accountability for historic institutional child abuse. Therefore, I am pleased to confirm that, at the beginning of April, I lodged a proposal for a member's bill—the apologies (Scotland) bill—which would, if passed, allow the meaningful apologies to which Graeme Pearson referred to be given to survivors and others.

17:22

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I join other members in thanking Graeme Pearson for bringing a very serious and important issue to the chamber. Like many members, I have been contacted by constituents on the issue of historic institutional abuse. It is one that, as a former member of the Public Petitions Committee, I have followed closely.

It is important to recognise that a number of survivors are in the public gallery, which is testament to their on-going commitment and determination to securing justice.

All parties and the Scottish Government need to listen to what our constituents are saying, because the reality is that, since Jack McConnell's statement and apology in the Parliament nearly a decade ago, progress towards justice for victims of historic abuse has stalled.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice said recently that the Scottish Government has spent £6.2 million on the survivor Scotland programme since

2007. I acknowledge the work that has been done to date, but the survivors to whom I have spoken feel strongly that that money has not had a direct impact on their lives.

We need to listen to those concerns. It is all very well for us to produce reports and frameworks, but if they are not being acted on and are not directly benefiting the people whom they were intended to benefit, the simple fact is that survivors of historic abuse are being failed. Survivors such as those who are here today deserve much better. That is why I join Graeme Pearson in urging the minister to outline the concrete steps that the Scottish Government will take to secure justice for victims.

As the motion highlights, the Scottish Human Rights Commission's action plan outlines a number of options for achieving proper acknowledgement and accountability. Many of the survivors to whom I have spoken feel that the issue of acknowledgement was addressed by Jack McConnell's apology in 2004, although I recognise that some members feel that more can be done in that area. Many of the survivors to whom I have spoken regard accountability as the priority now.

There are a number of issues and questions that my constituents have specifically asked me to raise today. Will the Scottish Government take real action to remove the time bar as a barrier to civil justice for victims of historic abuse? Will it work with others to create a national survivor reparation fund? Finally, does it support the establishment of a public inquiry? My constituents are asking that last question because such an inquiry has not been established, even though the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, supported it back in 2004. I also understand that, in 2003, the current Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Roseanna Cunningham, said:

"We need a major inquiry in Scotland into this issue".

The survivors to whom I have spoken point to the inquiry in Northern Ireland, which provides not only a confidential forum but a legal avenue that victims can pursue. I know that many survivors strongly believe that such a legal route should be available in Scotland. In fact, a survivor recently told me that only 46 of the more than 430 applicants in Northern Ireland have chosen to go down the confidential forum route, which demonstrates the support for pursuing justice by legal means in a judge-led inquiry.

My constituents believe that Scotland is lagging way behind other countries on this issue. We need to learn lessons but also reveal the truth. The historic abuse systemic review, whose report was published in 2007, highlighted a number of legal issues that still need to be investigated. The review learned that senior people had ordered

records to be destroyed; that alone is scandalous and requires further investigation. It also said:

“Many children died while living in children’s residential establishments. Some organisations have identified the children in graveyards. But in other cases searches have yielded few records identifying children or information about why they died.”

That point reinforces the need for more comprehensive action than the Scottish Government is currently offering.

Survivors want real action, and I urge the minister to listen not just to me but to the voices of survivors in my constituency and in the public gallery. If the minister progresses the actions that are being called for, she will have my full support. The survivors deserve justice.

17:26

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Graeme Pearson on securing this members’ business debate. I believe that we must, as the motion intends, recognise the value and vital importance of access to justice with regard to the legacy of abuse in modern Scotland. Despite the fact that, as the motion states,

“steps have been taken to address”

institutional

“child abuse”,

Graeme Pearson is right to make it clear that

“much more needs to be done”

about that legacy.

This is not a comfortable subject. Wrongs have been committed and protecting the victims of crime is, quite rightly, paramount. There can be no doubt that with the almost constant—indeed, daily—stream of allegations of child sexual abuse and other forms of abuse, historic and otherwise, there is a great need for accountability.

I come to this important debate as a member of the Public Petitions Committee that examined petition PE1351, which called for the establishment of a time for all to be heard forum. As Graeme Pearson has rightly pointed out, not all of those who have been abused are looking for compensation; in many cases, they are just looking for those in charge to acknowledge and to be accountable for what happened to them while they were in care.

The Scottish Government has taken steps to address these issues; it has, for example, provided funding for a time to be heard forum. In our discussions at the Public Petitions Committee, I have made it clear that data and access to historical records are vital in empowering survivors of this terrible abuse, a point that has been

reinforced in the SHRC’s action plan; indeed, as Neil Bibby has pointed out, some of those records have been destroyed by the organisations that were in charge of the children at the time. Moreover, in its consideration of PE1351, the committee has always been well aware of the time bar issue with regard to evidence, and it is important that we consider the time bar’s constraints in identifying and replicating good practice.

Modern Scotland has taken steps to address this issue through the Scottish Human Rights Commission, and the Scottish Government has quite rightly engaged with the commission’s interaction on historic abuse of children in care process. We need to realise that we owe the victims a legacy of openness and honesty, and the Scottish Government clearly has a role in that respect in developing and sustaining a national confidential forum, which has come about as a result of a previous consultation.

I appreciate that, in the motion, Graeme Pearson comes from a particular viewpoint in looking for a full public inquiry. I have a certain sympathy with that stance, although public inquiries have a rather chequered history, particularly in recent times, and not every victim is looking for a public inquiry. Many of the victims think that publicising or coming forward to declare their abuse would put further stress and strains on their mental health and wellbeing.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will Mr Wilson take a brief intervention?

John Wilson: I am sorry, but I do not have time, unless the Presiding Officer allows me to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a brief intervention.

Alex Fergusson: Nicola Sturgeon wrote to the Public Petitions Committee in 2004 and said:

“I appreciate that there are survivors of abuse who would not welcome an inquiry due to the trauma this could cause them. However, we must also consider those who do wish an inquiry.”

Does Mr Wilson agree with her? She was very supportive of an inquiry in 2004.

John Wilson: I do not disagree with Mr Fergusson. There will be people who will welcome the opportunity to come forward at an inquiry, but other victims will feel that giving evidence in a public forum would be too onerous. The time to be heard forum was established to allow those people to come forward confidentially and give information.

Graeme Pearson is quite rightly looking for justice now and in the future. That said, we need to learn difficult lessons from the past, particularly

as it has been highlighted in various media outlets in recent months that a significant number of sexual abuse cases have placed a spotlight on those who take advantage of holding influential and powerful positions in society to the detriment of victims who are less likely or unable to fight back, whether that be as a result of fear of persecution in the public eye or a belief that their voice will not be heard.

I look forward to the ministerial response to the issues that have been raised in the debate. I hope that we can right the wrongs that were perpetrated during those dark days and establish systems that do not allow a repeat of the abuses of the past. I hope that we as a society can move forward confident that we have rooted out the difficulties that people faced in the past and that we will see a better society for tomorrow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not wish to curtail the debate. Due to the number of members who still wish to speak, I am therefore minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Graeme Pearson.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:32

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I congratulate Graeme Pearson on securing the debate and once again pay tribute to the commitment, dedication and tenacity of survivors of institutional child abuse who have fought tooth and nail to have the issue raised and then kept on Parliament's agenda.

Time after time, we in Parliament commend ourselves on being at the forefront of issues and on leading the way on challenging subjects. When we do so, we are right to highlight why having a Scottish Parliament benefits the lives of Scotland's people. However, here we are again, 12 years on from the lodging of petition PE535, still asking why a satisfactory conclusion to past institutional child abuse has not been reached.

As the convener of the Public Petitions Committee in 2004, I was proud to play a part in securing an apology from the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, on behalf of the people of Scotland, for the abuse that affected far too many children who had been in the care of the state. I felt that it was a positive step that, following that apology, a commission was established to look into historic abuse, and I recognise that many think that that review has had a positive impact on residential care in Scotland since then. However, as Neil Bibby highlighted, the review identified a

number of issues that have not been progressed in the intervening period. So, we are no longer leading on the matter, but are watching country after country confronting its past failings and putting in place measures that do not just acknowledge the damage of the past, but seek to address the consequences of that shameful legacy.

Since my involvement with PE535, I have met many survivors of in-care child abuse. As well as admiring their strength and courage, I have been impressed by their desire for justice and not retribution. However, their sense of abandonment is what has struck me most. Yes—there is anger, hurt and pain, and lives have been devastated, and even those who have led successful lives after leaving childcare institutions have conveyed to me an impression of misery that has been caused by the struggle to cope with what happened to them in their early lives. However, they have used those emotions not in a negative way but in a fair and reasonable manner, to pursue support, help and advice—not just for themselves, but for others who they know have suffered but cannot find the strength to fight.

I therefore earnestly implore the minister to do something tonight. I know that she has spoken to the victims and heard their pleas, but what they need the minister to do now is to stop listening to her civil servants and to tell them to get on with putting in place the same remedies for Scottish abuse survivors as those that have been established around the world. Give them a public inquiry so that they, too, can obtain justice like people in Ireland, Australia and elsewhere. Let us get back to where we were in 2004 and lead the way in confronting what happened to those people who were, when they should have been cared for by the state, let down by our administrations and institutions.

Let us stop hiding behind bureaucracy and let us once and for all answer the call of the abused. They want justice.

17:36

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): As other members have, I begin by congratulating Graeme Pearson on bringing the debate to the chamber and on the way in which he introduced the debate. I am very grateful to him, because the debate gives me an opportunity to share a few thoughts that have been formed largely as a result of my having worked with a constituent, for far too many years now, to try to help him bring closure to the truly horrendous childhood experiences that he and his brother underwent when they were entrusted to the so-called care of Quarriers Homes. Sadly, that trust turned out to be entirely misplaced, and the abuse

to which they were subjected has impacted on their lives in ways that most of us can only hazard a guess at; I suspect that even then we will not come anywhere near the reality of the horror that they face daily.

My constituent did everything possible to seek justice through the courts, but his attempts were rejected at every turn. His brother, on the other hand, received national press coverage in 2008 after Quarriers agreed to an out-of-court financial settlement with him when he succeeded in bringing a case to court. I will return to the significance of that later.

In 2010, Dumfries and Galloway Council agreed without question to compensate people who were identified as having suffered abuse at the hands of an individual employee in a council-run residential home during the 1970s. Despite the fact that previous attempts to sue the council had been dismissed in court as being time-barred, the council commendably took it upon itself to hold up its hands, accept liability, take action to compensate the victims and, importantly, to apologise publicly. I agree that no amount of money could ever compensate for the abuse that was received and its consequential impact, but the simple message that the responsible organisation apologises publicly and acknowledges its responsibilities must in itself be of considerable comfort to those who have suffered the abuse.

So, we have one organisation that does its damndest to bring closure for its victims, while another hides behind the time-bar law while simultaneously buying off a potentially devastating court case with an out-of-court settlement for one individual whose brother cannot even get a public apology from the same organisation. That is a somewhat chaotic situation, which cannot continue.

I accept that the time to be heard initiative was very well intentioned, but it has failed to bring any measure of closure to many people who took part in it, including my constituents. If a clear message comes out of all of this, it is surely that there is no one-size-fits-all solution; every case and every individual has a different route to personal closure. That is why I think that any future Government action must involve serious interaction and engagement with the survivors themselves first and foremost. That is why I also very much commend the "Action Plan on Justice for Victims of Historic Abuse of Children in Care", to which the motion refers. I want to highlight in particular two proposed commitments in the action plan. The first is that consideration be given to a national inquiry on historic abuse; and the second is for a review of the way in which the time-bar law operates.

Interestingly, both those commitments were vigorously supported by no less a figure than the

Deputy First Minister when she was in the Opposition. It seems to be a shame that she has not brought that same level of commitment with her into the Government.

I spoke to my constituent at lunch time today to tell him that we are having this debate. He simply said, "Can you just tell them that all we really want is to be listened to and to be believed? When we were children, no one listened to us, and nobody believed us." We can put that right, and I hope that the debate helps us to take a step in that direction.

17:40

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): As other members have mentioned, at the end of this year it will have been 10 years since the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, apologised on behalf of the people of Scotland to victims of child abuse in Scottish residential care homes.

Yet, as we have heard, despite the reports that have been commissioned by the Scottish Government and the forums that have been set up, survivors are still denied access to justice for the appalling abuses of their human rights—abuses that frequently have affected the rest of their lives.

Those most vulnerable of children, whose families were unable to care for them, who did not have mums or dads who were able to look out for them and towards whom the state should have displayed the greatest possible care, were abandoned to predatory adults who were often in a position of authority over them and, in some cases, abandoned to abuse by other children.

We know that it was not just the odd aberrant institution; it happened in residential accommodation across the country over decades, and probably over centuries. Tom Shaw's report, which was published in 2007, estimated that around 1,000 children were abused in the Scottish care system between 1950 and 1995. Over the decades while that was going on, society looked the other way. There has been interest in the perpetrators, especially in those who are celebrities, but the experiences and the needs of the victims have received less attention.

I have had some contact with the survivors of the Merkland children's home in Dumfries and Galloway, to which Alex Fergusson referred. Merkland was a residential children's home in Moffat, which was opened in the 1960s by Dumfries County Council and was later operated by Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council.

When Peter Harley became officer in charge in 1977, he developed the home to accommodate what were described as "more difficult" young people coming through the children's hearings

system. I suspect that that was deliberate, as they were the ones who were least likely to be believed. He subjected the children in his care to a regime of physical and sexual assault. About 200 children came through Merkland during the five years when he was in charge. Forty-seven victims have come forward, but there is no way of knowing the total number of children who were actually abused by this individual.

Harley's crimes were not revealed until 1994, when one of his victims was being taken to court. He advised his social worker that his offending behaviour was a direct result of the abuse that he had suffered at Merkland. In the meantime, another victim had killed himself and another had drunk himself to death.

In 1996, Harley was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. He received a further sentence of eight years for further offences that were revealed later, but he was released from prison after only 10 years. As Alex Fergusson said, five victims tried to sue the local authority, but their cases were of course dismissed by the Court of Session in 2005 as being time barred. That is something that we need to address. In 2009, however, Dumfries and Galloway Council took the decision to publicly apologise and to make individual ex gratia payments of £20,000 to each of the adult survivors. I believe that the council must be congratulated for that. It was not forced to do that; it chose to take responsibility. Many other authorities have refused to do so, however.

We know that various reports have been commissioned and that the national confidential forum is being established, but are we really any closer, after 10 years, to ensuring that responsibility is taken for what happened to those hundreds—possibly thousands—of child victims, who were let down by those who were supposed to be looking after them?

I believe that a public inquiry, possibly along the lines of Northern Ireland's historical institutional abuse inquiry, which, as Graeme Pearson mentioned, is inquisitorial rather than adversarial, might address some of the concerns that other members have expressed on behalf of victims. Such an inquiry could identify the systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties of care towards these children, and it could determine what support—apology, compensation or therapeutic interventions—would benefit survivors and meet their needs. Having been at the front, Scotland is now lagging behind other countries in taking responsibility.

Abuse is still happening. Only in November last year, a care worker was sentenced to six years for sexual offences against three young girls in West Dunbartonshire. Another important thing that a public inquiry could do is help to identify the

additional measures that need to be taken to prevent future incidents.

It strikes me that we need to understand the process of the abuse of power. That is what all this came down to—the abuse of power by people who were in positions of authority over those who were vulnerable. Unless we address that, we will never put things right for victims.

17:45

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): I congratulate Graeme Pearson on securing the debate and on the careful and sympathetic way in which he handled a difficult subject—the same applies to all the members who have spoken.

I will start by responding to issues that lie in the justice portfolio. Members will realise that a number of aspects of the debate range into the health portfolio, and I will address those, too.

It is useful to remind ourselves that there is no time bar for criminal prosecutions. Tonight's debate is entirely about civil justice. Sometimes, the lines of conversation are blurred around that, although I do not suggest that members tonight have done that. There is no time limit in the criminal law of Scotland for raising prosecutions in respect of any case. What we are talking about is all connected with the civil law alone.

For claims that are raised under the civil law, it is in the interest of all members of society to have an effective framework that allows cases to be resolved quickly and fairly. That applies to both sides of the coin. As some members know, we have consulted on a range of issues that relate to damages for personal injury, on the basis of Scottish Law Commission recommendations.

Modest as those recommendations were—I will say a little more about them—there was no clear consensus on many of them. For example, on the time bar, there was not even universal agreement on the move from a three-year to a five-year limitation period for personal injury claims. The current limit for financial loss is five years. It has always seemed odd to me that people have more time to contemplate financial loss than personal injury, but even that modest recommendation could not attract widespread support. People must remember that we need to look at the bigger time-bar issue.

The commission did not recommend that special provision should be made for any specific category of pursuer. Its recommendations recognised that there is merit in having a limitation period that applies universally. However, the commission also made recommendations that would enable

pursuers' personal circumstances to be taken into account when the time bar is considered.

We need to exercise caution when we make comparisons with what other jurisdictions have done, although I do not recall any members making such comparisons tonight. Many jurisdictions that have removed the time bar from their systems do not have the discretion that is available to our judges to disapply the time bar. I know that there is controversy about whether judges are applying that discretion as widely as they can, but it is a valuable tool to enable time-bar issues in difficult cases to be properly considered. We have the capacity to expand and enhance that part of our system.

I should say something about apologies and Margaret Mitchell's proposed bill, which I have met her to discuss. I put it on record that the proposal's aim—to encourage and protect the giving of apologies by private and public bodies to achieve a better outcome for victims and reduce the number of cases that result in litigation—is desirable. However, the devil is always in the detail—I have had that conversation with the member. Until we have seen the final proposal, it is hard for me to take a firm view. However, I look forward to continuing to work with the member on the issue. I agree that it is a significant part of the entire debate that we look closely at the capacity for us to introduce something along those lines.

Although I have talked about a couple of direct justice portfolio issues, a range of work is being taken forward across the Scottish Government. I was disappointed that the motion did not refer to the national confidential forum, so I am glad that Graeme Pearson raised it. The forum is another way in which we are acknowledging and recognising survivors of institutional child abuse. We have built on the time to be heard pilot forum and legislated for the NCF through the recent Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014.

We have had great support from survivors, who have given us their advice about the legislation and about how the NCF should operate. It is good that the debate gives me the chance to thank them for their contribution, so recently given. The NCF will give survivors of institutional child abuse the right to give their testimony to an independent panel in whatever way they choose. The forum has a statutory duty to signpost services that may be useful to participants. It will make it easier for survivors to report abuse allegations to the police and it will also benefit children now by highlighting why abuse happened in institutions and what can be done to prevent abuse happening in the same settings today. We know that survivors are very keen to prevent any child from being abused and their testimony at the NCF will be an important part of that. Members will be happy to hear that we

hope to have the forum operational in the autumn of this year.

It is likely that I will overrun my allotted seven minutes, Presiding Officer, but, with your indulgence, I think that the issues are important enough to allow that to happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, indeed.

Roseanna Cunningham: The survivor Scotland strategy was mentioned by a number of members. It is now almost 10 years since it started its groundbreaking work in 2005. Under the strategy, and with the advice and support of survivors, support agencies and other stakeholders, many projects are providing a huge range of services to thousands of survivors. In that time, we have invested more than £6 million. I think that it was Neil Bibby who referred to that. More than £1.5 million will have been spent on establishing the support agency, the in care survivor service Scotland, which will be up and running next year. Those are concrete things that are happening now. I would not like members to go away with the impression that everything has stalled. It has not—things are continuing to happen.

I am also pleased that the motion highlights the SHRC's action plan. We have worked with the SHRC and other stakeholders in the interaction and we think that it has been a very valuable process. It would be premature for me to make any response about the commitments that are proposed in that plan until after we have seen the results of the consultation on the plan. The Government hopes to be able to make a full response next month. Unfortunately, the debate is this month. I know that everybody who has spoken in the debate will be waiting eagerly to see what that response is. That will include a decision on a reparation scheme, which was mentioned by a few members, including Graeme Pearson, Sandra White and Neil Bibby. I need to put on record that the Government is still committed to scoping out a possible reparation scheme. However, as I said, we need to wait until we see the outcome of the consultation on the action plan.

That leads me on to the bigger issue of the public inquiry, which a number of members have raised. Not everyone is absolutely convinced of its necessity. Again, that is reflected in the interaction and in some of the other contributions. There is no unanimity about the issue. The motion speaks about a full public inquiry, but it is important to note that the action plan does not include that in its recommendations, although it considered it carefully. Among the concerns about holding an inquiry were that it might take a very long time, that outcomes might not offer tangible support, that it might be expensive and that it would have the potential for conflict and further trauma. Those are not glib reasons for being unconvinced about

having a public inquiry; they are carefully thought-through reasons in that interaction process. We have to listen carefully to that. I would not want to be in a position of saying never, but I think that we have to listen carefully to the conflicted views on the issue and not assume that there is unanimity.

Graeme Pearson: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are running quite late. I will give way if the Presiding Officer permits it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

Graeme Pearson: I would be grateful if the minister could give an assurance that she will consider the possibilities in a critical sense and measure the benefit that it would bring to victims to engage in that public inquiry, should that be deemed to be the best way forward.

Roseanna Cunningham: The difficulty is that some victims expressly did not want a public inquiry.

A number of people have referenced the Northern Ireland inquiry. I should just say that that had three different components, two of which are already reflected in things that we are currently doing; it is just that we have not badged them in that way. We should be a little bit careful about making assumptions about what is happening. *[Interruption.]* Mr Pearson might find that the third element does not necessarily bring what is required.

A number of survivors and other stakeholders were not convinced that a public inquiry is the best option, and they considered that there have been enough reviews and inquiries, some of which have been mentioned already, such as the Kerelaw school inquiry and the historical abuse systemic inquiry that was carried out by Tom Shaw. However, we have agreed to commission an independent exercise by experts at the centre of excellence for looked-after children in Scotland.

A lot is happening, and still more is in progress. I ask members to recognise that. The subject is complex and difficult and ranges over a wide range of policy areas in Government. It would be wrong to give the impression that nothing is happening. It might not be badged in the way that people want it to be badged, but that is a different issue. A great deal of concrete progress is currently in play, and some is coming on stream. I ask members to look out for that when they see it happening.

As always—as I offered prior to this debate—my colleague Kenny MacAskill and I are happy to meet people, if that is what they wish, to talk through some of the issues that we have discussed tonight.

Meeting closed at 17:56.

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