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Tuesday 6 September 2016

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 6 September 2016

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome back.

The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, and our leader today is the Rev Monica Michelin-Salomon, who is the minister for Causeway Tollcross Church of Scotland, in Glasgow.

The Rev Monica Michelin-Salomon (Causeway Tollcross Church of Scotland, Glasgow): Presiding Officer, members of Parliament and everyone here, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the opportunity to address you. I am Italian by birth, Scottish by adoption, ordained in the Waldensian Church and currently serving in the east end of Glasgow.

Virginia Woolf wrote:

“As a woman, I have no country ... I want no country ... my country is the whole world.”

To me, that applies well, as I have a distinct preference for wild and untamed places. Tollcross-Shettleston parish is one of them. It is challenging and demanding, as are many who inhabit the place. It is known as a location of multiple deprivation and often prejudices are the only available narratives about the place. Its categorising is often partial and unkind.

I have one example to the contrary. The church became involved in hospitality towards another Christian denomination almost by accident. A group of Eritreans asked permission to worship in the sanctuary. Their congregation is almost entirely formed by young refugees who are predominately male. It has 70 members and is growing. Most of its members had a treacherous journey across land, desert and sea to get here. Despite all that, they have an unwavering faith and look hopefully on the future and on humanity itself.

Worship on a Sunday is now Italian-Scot Presbyterian in the morning and Tigrigna Coptic Orthodox in the afternoon. Learning to share the same space and accept each other has not always been easy. For some it was an innate instinct and for others it has been a learning curve, but for all involved it has been a profound experience of growth and acknowledgement of interconnectedness. We knew it intellectually and we knew it inside ourselves, but to know it whole-

heartedly was a completely different matter. It was a change of perception that will never be forgotten.

On one of the guys' backpacks there was a sticker that read “Mediterranean Hope”. I knew of that project, which is based on Lampedusa, an island near Sicily, and is funded by the eight per thousand of the Waldensian Church. In that one life saved we found a deep connection between countries, traditions, and customs, raised above all distinctions: humanity at its very best.

That is the east end, too: people battling to survive through many adversities, addictions and mounting debts but still open and willing to learn and to change, and still generous to a fault. In the midst of it all is the church, which is maybe small in numbers but not small in efforts, tirelessly working in hospitality with community groups, food banks and charities in and outside Scotland, making God's love felt one life at a time.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move on to the next item of business, members will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery the honourable Myrna Driedger, who is the speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. *[Applause.]*

Business Motion

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-01238, 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 September 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister Statement: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2016-17

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2016-17

followed by First Minister's Motion to appoint a Junior Scottish Minister

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 September 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance and the Constitution;
Economy, Jobs and Fair Work

followed by First Minister Statement: Scotland's Place in Europe

followed by Continuation of Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2016-17

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion on Membership of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 September 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Update on Named Persons

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland Welcomes 1,000 Refugees

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 13 September 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 September 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

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 September 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is topical question time. In order to get through as many as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions.

Edinburgh to Glasgow Improvement Programme

1. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the cost of the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme. (S5T-00043)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): As I indicated in my letter to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee on 5 July, the Office of Rail and Road published a report, also on 5 July, that identified risks around Network Rail's increased cost estimates in many cases across the United Kingdom, including EGIP.

I remain deeply frustrated by Network Rail's inability to deliver EGIP within its estimated budget, and I have written to Mark Carne, who is the chief executive of Network Rail, to make it clear that the Scottish Government simply does not accept and is not prepared to accept the long-term cost implications. To that end, I have instructed Transport Scotland to undertake an intensive review of the entire programme. That review is expected to conclude later this month.

Neil Bibby: Reports that the project is now behind schedule and over budget due to some fundamental errors are extremely concerning to passengers and taxpayers alike. Further to what the minister has just said, can he confirm that overhead wires were indeed installed at wrong heights; that bridges were built too low to meet basic safety standards; that an extra £32 million was spent on the project last year alone; and that the total bill is set to rise even further? Can he tell us exactly how that was allowed to happen and when EGIP will finally be completed?

Humza Yousaf: I will try to strike a note of consensus. I agree with the member. It is utterly unacceptable, and the point of the review is to put Network Rail through the mill and ensure that we account for every single penny that it insists has to be spent in addition to its original estimates. We expect the Parliament and its committees also to hold Network Rail to account. To that end, I made it very clear when I spoke to Mark Carne that I expect Network Rail officials to appear in front of the Parliament's committees.

It would be unsurprising to the member if I said that our press sometimes has a tendency to

overegg and sensationalise some aspects of transport policy. Network Rail disputes that the overhead wires that the member mentioned were the cause of the increases. The cost increases are principally due to the poor performance and productivity of the contractor, Network Rail's ineffective management of that contractor, and compliance issues that have not just affected projects in Scotland but have had a devastating effect on projects that have had to be cancelled south of the border.

I agree with the member. It is utterly unacceptable. Let us see what the review says at the end of the month, let us pull Network Rail in front of the Parliament, and let us get answers from it.

Neil Bibby: Obviously, that is not the only issue that affected passengers this summer. Passengers have had to endure a summer of disruption on Scotland's railways. We have seen the Queen Street tunnel closure, major delays on the Borders railway and other routes, 12 days of industrial action over staff safety concerns, and now EGIP is delayed and over budget. Passengers have been very patient, but that patience has been stretched to the limit.

If the Government is willing to take the credit for rail infrastructure projects, it has to take responsibility, as well. Can the travelling public therefore now expect an apology from the Government for the level of disruption and the delays that they have experienced over the past few months, which seem set to continue?

Humza Yousaf: It may be a new parliamentary session, but it is the same old Scottish Labour Party. To be accused of a summer of chaos by Scottish Labour is quite ironic.

Let us take a few of the projects that the member cited. He mentioned the Queen Street tunnel. Of course, the tunnel was opened ahead of schedule and under budget. He mentioned the Borders railway, whose first anniversary it is today. Passenger numbers on the line have exceeded forecasts. We should be celebrating that, although, yes, there are still improvements to be made.

We have instructed a review of the Network Rail issues. The review will report back on the causes of the issues, the estimates for the budget and the timescale. I will certainly ask questions of Network Rail and I expect every member to do the same. I gently make the point to the member, who is the shadow transport secretary, that the overestimates were made the matter of public record on 5 July but I have not had a single piece of correspondence from him for two months until today, which is conveniently the Parliament's first day back.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I understand that the Queen Street tunnel project is a distinct project but that it also overlaps with EGIP. Will the minister confirm that the project went smoothly, the closure was acceptable and some of the work, such as the lengthening of the platforms, has already happened in preparation for EGIP?

Humza Yousaf: I am pleased to say that the Queen Street tunnel closure and the improvements that have been made to it have been successful. That does not take away from the fact that we are still disappointed about the potential delays and the cost overestimates associated with EGIP. We have instructed a review, which is on-going, and then we will put Network Rail under scrutiny for that.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): A hallmark of the railway line upgrade so far has been the engagement with the public well in advance of each of the potential disruptions or delays. However, many people were astonished to find, with just a few days' notice, that there would be no train service between Glasgow and Edinburgh after 8.30 in the evenings from Sunday through to Thursday and there would be late starts on Sundays. Was the information to make the public aware of that very considerable change adequate?

Humza Yousaf: The member raises a fair point. The Queen Street tunnel closure went well because of the front-footed nature of the communications, and I thank my predecessor for that. I have had a number of members write, email and get in touch with me about the fact that the disruptions were not communicated in advance. That is something that ScotRail should reflect on; I will certainly have a conversation with it and, indeed, my own officials in Transport Scotland on how communication should be handled better.

"Scotland's colleges 2016"

2. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take in response to the findings of the Audit Scotland report, "Scotland's colleges 2016". (S5T-00040)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Audit Scotland report "Scotland's colleges 2016" is helpful in confirming that Scotland's college sector is financially stable overall, and that colleges continue to exceed their targets for the amount of student learning to be delivered. More generally, the report highlights what is working well and where improvements can be made. We will work closely with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and colleges to consider the findings and recommendations and to ensure that we continue

to deliver on the successes that we have had, such as the number of full-time students under 25 increasing by 13 per cent since 2006-07.

Tavish Scott: The minister will know that Audit Scotland's report "Scotland's colleges 2015" said:

"it is unclear what savings"

from college mergers

"have been achieved ... and what the full costs of the merger process are".

Audit Scotland delivered that indictment last year and delivered it again just last week. Today, more than 2,000 college support staff are demonstrating over pay. Will the Government publish the real costs of college mergers so that staff taking industrial action and Parliament know the truth, as Audit Scotland recommended?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am sure that Tavish Scott will have read in detail the funding council's report "Impact and success of the programme of college mergers in Scotland", which goes into the issues in great detail. It estimates the one-off cost of mergers to be £69.6 million and the savings each year to be £52.2 million. I know from my summer visits to campuses across the country that we are already seeing success and better outcomes for students, decreased duplication and a high-quality learning environment for the students. The funding council report that I have mentioned details the work that Tavish Scott has asked for.

Tavish Scott: That begs the question why Audit Scotland made the same recommendation twice. The minister might simply want to reflect on that.

Audit Scotland has said that there has been a 41 per cent decrease in the number of college students and a 48 per cent decrease in the number of part-time places at colleges, which has particularly affected women. What steps will the minister and her Government take to recognise the impact of college mergers on part-time students? What is she planning to do to reverse the cull of those college places, which are so essential, particularly for women?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The member will be well aware that we set out in our manifesto our commitment to have 116,000 full-time-equivalent places in the college sector. We have kept that commitment, and the entire basis for our college policy is to ensure that we are providing the adequate and correct courses, which are required for employers in the area. That is what we are seeing: full-time courses that are leading to employment.

That is not to say that short-term courses are not being funded; of course they are. Those that lead to employment are still being funded. For

example, 97 per cent of learning hours in 2014-15 were delivered on courses that led to a recognised qualification. That will have a direct impact on the economy in the local area.

The member referred to the place of women in our college sector. That is, of course, extremely important, which is why I am delighted that the figures show that women are in the majority in the college population, at 52 per cent in 2014-15. However, we are not resting there; we are ensuring, through the funding council's gender action plan, that we take action on specific courses where gender imbalance exists. The member should also bear in mind that the number of women in full-time courses has increased by 16 per cent since 2006-07.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister mentioned the funding council. In Audit Scotland's reports on colleges and universities, questions were asked about whether there has been a lack of clarity in the funding council's role when it comes to outcome agreements and discussions with individual colleges and universities. What is the Scottish Government doing to respond to that criticism?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I said in my answer to Tavish Scott, we are working with the funding council and colleges to take on board the recommendations in the reports on Scotland's colleges, as well as the report on universities that the member mentioned. If there are lessons for the Government to learn, we will learn them in partnership with the funding council, colleges and universities.

Programme for Government 2016-17

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by the First Minister on the Scottish Government's programme for government. The First Minister's statement will be followed by a debate, so there should be no interventions or interruptions during the statement.

14:17

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This is a new Parliament, with new powers, operating in a new political, economic and constitutional context. The programme for government that we publish today sets out how we will use those new powers and adapt to that new context. It includes all the bills that will be introduced between now and the end of June next year. However, it recognises that government is about more than legislation. It therefore sets our legislative programme in the context of our wider ambitions and—crucially—it sets out how we will seek to protect Scotland's interests, particularly our economic interests, in the wake of the European Union referendum.

Most important of all, the programme demonstrates how we will implement the mandate that the people of Scotland gave us in May to drive sustainable economic growth, reform education and create opportunities for all, transform our public services and empower local communities.

Four of the bills that we will introduce this year will make use of new powers that are being devolved to this Parliament. The air passenger duty bill will enable a replacement tax to be introduced from April 2018. The Government's intention is to halve the overall level of APD by the end of this parliamentary session, to support growth and improve our connections with countries across the globe—priorities that are even more pressing as a result of the EU referendum.

The railway policing bill will prepare the way for the British Transport Police in Scotland to be integrated into Police Scotland while continuing to exercise their highly specialist railway policing functions.

The gender balance on public boards bill will use new powers to tackle an issue that I know commands considerable consensus across this chamber. Gender balance on public boards is an area in which strong progress has already been made—2015 was the first year in which more women than men were appointed to public boards in Scotland—but that progress must be maintained and built on. The bill will help to ensure that the

public sector leads by example in delivering true gender equality in Scotland.

Finally, and perhaps most important, we will introduce a social security bill, which will see us take the first steps towards a distinctive Scottish social security system, based on dignity and respect. The bill will support delivery of key policy commitments: for example, an increase in carers allowance, a new best start grant for low-income parents, a new and more humane approach to disability assessments, and abolition of the bedroom tax. The bill will be a powerful demonstration of our determination to use new powers to create the fairer Scotland that we wish to see.

Later this year, we will introduce the annual budget bill. As part of the budget process, we will set out how we will use our new income tax powers fairly and progressively.

The ability to use such new powers and responsibilities would in itself make this a landmark year for our Parliament, but we are also operating in a new context. The outcome of the EU referendum has created significant uncertainty and anxiety for individuals, businesses, organisations and communities across the country. That means that the work of the Government and the Parliament is more important than ever. We must do everything that we can to reassure our citizens, protect Scotland's interests and retain our place in Europe.

At the end of June, Parliament provided a mandate for the Government to explore all options for retaining the benefits of EU membership. I will update members on that work in a statement tomorrow. Today, my focus is on the actions that we are taking now to support the economy, drive improvement in our public services, and create a fairer society. The people of Scotland endorsed our policy programme when they re-elected us in May. Today's statement is about the nuts and bolts of delivery—the hard graft of turning our manifesto into reality.

I turn first to the economy. Over the next year, we will continue to focus on the four pillars of our economic strategy—investment, innovation, internationalisation and inclusive growth.

A few weeks ago, in recognition of the economic uncertainty that Brexit has created, I announced that we would invest an additional £100 million in capital projects in this financial year. Today, I am setting out the detail of the projects that that accelerated funding will support. The projects have been assessed against the criteria that we set out previously and they range from energy efficiency measures in homes and public buildings to trunk road maintenance and rail improvements, and from investment in hospitals—specifically the

Golden Jubilee national hospital, Inverclyde royal hospital and Glasgow royal infirmary—to maintenance in our universities and colleges and across the police and fire estates. That investment will bring immediate economic benefits and support jobs, but it will also improve the infrastructure of our public services for years to come.

I confirm that European structural funds projects with a total value of £290 million have now been approved. With partner funding, that will mean total investment of £650 million in communities and businesses between now and 2018. In addition, in the next financial year, we will invest about £4 billion in infrastructure, which will include investment in the priorities that our infrastructure investment plan sets out.

This morning, I visited the new Boroughmuir high school, which is one of 29 new schools that I can confirm will open in this academic year as part of our schools for the future programme. Those 29 new schools will take the total number of schools that have been built or refurbished under the Government to more than 630.

Over the coming year, we will see the completion of three major transport projects—the Queensferry crossing, the Aberdeen bypass and the M8, M73 and M74 motorway project.

We will invest more than £570 million in affordable housing this year as part of our £3 billion plan to build 50,000 affordable homes—35,000 of which will be for social rent—over the parliamentary session. We will also introduce a housing bill to ensure that registered social landlords continue to be classified in a way that enables them to borrow money to invest. We will help more people into home ownership through continued support for our shared equity programmes.

Our infrastructure investment will support our transition to a low-carbon economy. We are committed to introducing a climate change bill later in the session. We met our current target of a 42 per cent reduction in emissions six years ahead of schedule, and the new bill will set the ambitious new target of a reduction of more than 50 per cent in actual Scottish emissions by 2020.

As part of the programme for government, we will publish a new climate change plan and a new energy strategy, which will together set out our low-carbon infrastructure priorities. As well as helping us to meet our climate change obligations, that will provide investors with certainty and a clear sense of direction.

We have delivered on our commitment to make energy efficiency a national infrastructure priority and, over this year and the next three years, we will support that with more than £500 million of

public funding. That investment will help thousands of households and businesses, and it will deliver warmer homes alongside widespread social, economic and environmental benefits. We will also introduce a warm homes bill later in the session.

Finally on investment, let me turn to digital infrastructure. In the modern economy, good-quality digital connections are as fundamental to business success as electricity or running water. When I became First Minister in November 2014, broadband coverage across Scotland was 63 per cent. By the end of last year, it had reached 85 per cent. I can confirm today that we will invest £90 million over the next year to ensure that we reach our target of 95 per cent by the end of 2017.

Even more ambitiously, over the coming year we will publish a detailed delivery plan setting out how we will deliver our commitment to provide superfast broadband to 100 per cent of commercial and residential premises by the end of this parliamentary session—a transformational investment for all of Scotland but particularly for those living and working in our rural communities.

As well as investing in our vital infrastructure, we are stepping up our support for business in the wake of the referendum. We have set up a new business information service to provide advice and support for businesses that are worried about Brexit. We are also establishing a new post-referendum business network, bringing together the Scottish Government, the Scotland Office, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and business organisations to shape future policy and support.

We will invest £3.5 million to establish and support new innovation and investment hubs in London, Dublin and Brussels. Those hubs will play a key role in attracting investment to Scotland and in helping indigenous businesses to access new markets—objectives that are all the more important in the new circumstances that we face.

We will work to ensure that we have a competitive and fair system of business rates. From April next year, the number of businesses benefiting from the small business bonus will increase to 100,000. We also look forward to receiving the recommendations from the wider review of business rates that is currently under way and to acting on them as quickly as possible.

I am determined that we will do more to support our manufacturing base. Manufacturing employs nearly 200,000 people across our country, and it accounts for over half of our international exports and half of our research and development spend. Yesterday, I visited Alexander Dennis in Falkirk, which is one of our most successful manufacturing companies, to announce the biggest R and D grant ever awarded by Scottish Enterprise—an

example of the practical help that the Government provides to companies with growth potential.

The on-going review of our enterprise and skills support will ensure that our agencies continue to support businesses in the most efficient and well-targeted way. Today, I can confirm that, over the next year, we will finalise the business case for a new national manufacturing institute—a partnership between the Government and our agencies, the University of Strathclyde and the private sector to create a manufacturing centre of excellence and a skills academy that is focused on helping companies to innovate and compete in international markets.

The difficulties that our oil and gas sector faces are well known, and we will continue to do all that we can to support a healthy future for the sector through the energy jobs task force. I am also determined that our economy will get maximum benefit from planned decommissioning. It is estimated that expenditure on decommissioning over the 10 years to 2024 will be in the region of £17 billion—two thirds of it occurring in the period after 2020. That is why Scottish Enterprise is developing a comprehensive decommissioning action plan. That will inform the range of actions and the necessary investments in capacity and infrastructure that will help to maximise the economic return to the Scottish economy.

There is one further significant economic initiative that I want to announce today as a response to the challenging economic circumstances that we face: we intend to use the strength of our balance sheet to establish a new Scottish growth scheme worth up to £0.5 billion over the next three years.

The scheme will be targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises that have significant growth or export potential but that find it difficult to access investment finance on the necessary scale. It will offer guarantees—or, where appropriate, loans—of up to £5 million per eligible business. The guarantees will appear on our balance sheet as contingent liabilities—they will not come from existing spending on public services—and they will help us to remove some of the uncertainty and share some of the risk that those high-potential businesses face when making big investment or export decisions.

The policy marks a new departure for the Scottish Government. It is an exceptional response to an exceptional economic challenge. It will require some change to the parliamentary procedures associated with approving Government guarantees. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution will discuss that with the Finance Committee and party spokespeople shortly.

The scheme will not require a single penny of investment from the United Kingdom Government. However, it will require its co-operation in agreeing the budgeting treatment of the guarantees—I hope that that support will be forthcoming. This is a half billion pound vote of confidence in Scottish business, Scottish workers and the Scottish economy. I hope that we can count on support from across the chamber to make it a reality.

Before I move on from our support for business, I want to underline our commitment to inclusive growth. Indeed, the potential for a UK Government outside the EU to resort to deregulation and a race to the bottom makes that work even more important. We will encourage more businesses to sign up to the business pledge, and we will increase the number of accredited living wage employers to 1,000 by this time next year. We will take forward our new labour market strategy and use new powers to abolish fees for employment tribunals.

Unlike the UK Government, we will work with trade unions as partners, investing in trade union modernisation and in workplace development through the Scottish union learning fund. We will also support the fair work convention in the next phase of its work. We will work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to tackle pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and we will establish a returners programme to help women return to work after a career break.

In short, we are determined to build an economy where everyone has a fair chance to contribute to growth and where everyone can share in the benefits of that growth.

I turn now to what I have already described as the defining mission of this Government: education. Our work to close the attainment gap starts in the early years. By the end of this parliamentary session, we will have doubled the amount of free care available to all three and four-year-olds and the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. That is a truly transformational investment that will not only benefit children and families, but provide employment opportunities for an additional 20,000 early years workers.

Over the next year, the detail of the delivery of the policy will take shape. We will publish a policy blueprint, setting out clear milestones for delivery through to 2020 and, from January, we will pilot different models for delivering the expanded provision. We will work with local authorities to deliver on our promise that, by 2018, every nursery in our most deprived communities will benefit from an additional qualified teacher or childcare graduate.

One of the effects of our early years policy, when fully implemented, will be a significant

reduction in childcare costs for parents. However, I recognise that in the meantime those costs—particularly the up-front costs—can be prohibitive. That is why I am also announcing today that we will immediately examine different ways to reduce those costs through, for example, a deposit guarantee scheme. The communities secretary will set out further details in the soon-to-be published fairer Scotland action plan, which will also respond in full to the first set of recommendations from our poverty adviser.

Our work to ensure that children get the best start in their early years will be matched by our work to improve attainment in our schools. In the next year, as part of the Scottish attainment fund, we will invest an additional £150 million in our schools, targeted at overcoming the impact of deprivation. One hundred million pounds of that will come directly from our reforms to the council tax, and I can announce today that the regulations giving effect to those changes will be laid in Parliament this week.

Our additional investment will be matched by reform. Implementation of the new national improvement framework is already under way. Standardised assessments—not tests, but assessments that will inform teacher judgments—will be piloted before the end of this year and implemented across Scotland next year. We will publish the first school-by-school information on the numbers of children meeting the required curriculum for excellence levels in December. That will tell us more accurately what the extent of the attainment gap is and allow us to set clear targets for closing it.

Our reforms also involve freeing and empowering teachers to do what they do best: teach. Last week, John Swinney set out measures to reduce the unnecessary workload that teachers face. I can announce today that he will publish the governance review next week, which will look at the system changes that are required to empower schools and decentralise management. We will introduce an education bill in the second year of this parliamentary session to implement any proposals requiring legislation. In March, we will consult on a new, fair and transparent national funding formula for schools to ensure that how we fund our schools supports our ambition to achieve both excellence and equity.

As we take forward our school reforms, we will continue to work collaboratively with councils, teachers and parents. We will also take advice from our new international council of education advisers. The council met for the first time last week and expressed strong support for our direction of travel.

I have said that I want to be judged on our success in narrowing and, ultimately, closing the

attainment gap. We must not tolerate a situation where some children from deprived areas do less well at school than those from affluent areas. The measures that we will implement over the next five years constitute a comprehensive approach to tackling that attainment gap. I have no doubt that they will be closely scrutinised, but I hope that they will gain widespread support.

Of course, our determination to promote opportunities for all does not stop when young people leave school. We will maintain the number of full-time equivalent college places at their current level. We will also protect free university tuition and continue our work to increase the number of modern apprenticeships and develop our young workforce. We are currently developing the implementation plan for the recommendations made by the commission on widening access to university, and over the next few weeks we will confirm the appointment of an independent widening access commissioner. I can also confirm today that, from the next academic year, care-experienced young people will be entitled to full bursaries. In addition, we will work with universities to guarantee a place for those who fulfil the minimum qualification requirements. Lastly, I can announce today that next month we will embark on a major review of student support, as promised in our manifesto. It is vital that the arrangements that we have in place support our commitment to widening access.

We understand that our work to ensure equality in education must extend well beyond the gates of our nurseries, schools, colleges and universities. That is why the new child poverty bill is arguably the most important piece of legislation that we will introduce this year. The bill will establish Scotland as the only part of the UK with statutory income targets on child poverty.

The bill will be backed by real action. For example, our new best start grant will provide financial support to low-income parents when their child is born, when their child starts nursery and, again, when their child starts school. Over the coming year, I am proud to say that we will also introduce the baby box, offering essential items such as clothing, bedding and books for all newborn babies. Our overall aim is clear: from the moment that parents receive their baby box, right through to when young adults go to college or university or into apprenticeships and jobs, supporting children and families is at the heart of this Government's priorities. We want to ensure that every young person can fulfil their potential, because that is the only way in which Scotland can fulfil its potential.

We will also continue to invest in and reform our other key public services. Last week's patient experience survey showed record levels of

satisfaction with our national health service, which is a credit to healthcare staff across our country—today, I thank them again. It is important now that we build on that. Over this parliamentary session, we will increase resource spending in our NHS by £500 million more than inflation. We will transfer at least £250 million each year from the NHS to health and social care partnerships to build the capacity and resilience of our social care services. I am also delighted to confirm that, with effect from the start of next month, all adult social care workers will be paid the real living wage.

As we see from figures published today, there are already record numbers of staff working in our NHS, but we have plans in place to train more nurses, more doctors—including general practitioners—more paramedics and more community link workers. We will shortly publish a new national workforce plan and, later in this parliamentary session, we will legislate to enshrine safe staffing levels in law.

We are also investing to transform primary care. We are helping GPs to work in multidisciplinary teams with allied healthcare professionals such as pharmacists, community nurses and social workers. Over the next year, we will develop, in partnership with the British Medical Association, a new GP contract to support more accessible services.

In the coming year, we will also publish our new mental health strategy, supported by increased investment of £150 million over the session. We will also take forward major investments in our hospital estate. We will invest £200 million to expand the Golden Jubilee national hospital and establish five new elective treatment centres for procedures such as hip and knee replacements. Those specialised centres will provide better, quicker and safer care for patients, freeing up other hospitals to deal with emergency cases. That is another example of how we are investing now to prepare our health service for the decades ahead.

We are also investing in and reforming our justice system. We will introduce four justice bills over the next year; they will meet very different needs but they are all significant. The contract (third party rights) bill and the expenses and funding of civil litigation bill will implement recommendations from experts. The first will clarify existing common-law provisions, and the second will make civil justice fairer and more affordable and accessible.

The limitation (childhood abuse) bill will implement a recommendation from the Scottish Human Rights Commission. At present, personal injury actions can be started only within three years of the individual knowing that an injury has been sustained. As the SHRC has pointed out,

that is not appropriate in relation to child abuse, where the reasons for victims often not coming forward until later in life are entirely understandable. The bill will ensure that the justice system works better for victims of such terrible crimes.

Finally, the domestic abuse bill will ensure that our law is able to deal with the true nature and severity of domestic abuse. At present, physical abuse can be prosecuted, but it is often more challenging to prosecute psychological abuse. The bill will therefore ensure that coercive and controlling behaviour can be dealt with more effectively. It will also help to shape public attitudes by explicitly acknowledging that psychological abuse is unacceptable and criminal. The bill is an important signal of our determination to tackle domestic abuse in all its forms. It will therefore make an important contribution to our aim of achieving true gender equality.

Those bills sit alongside other measures to enhance public safety. We will radically change how we deal with female offenders in Scotland. Work has already started in preparation for the construction of a smaller women's prison on the Cornton Vale site. We will also establish community-based custody units for women offenders to help rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

From next April, the establishment of community justice Scotland will bring new national leadership to the community justice sector, thereby ensuring that it delivers better outcomes for communities across our country.

We will also protect Police Scotland's revenue budget in real terms, delivering an extra £100 million over the parliamentary session. Crime levels in Scotland are already at their lowest for more than 40 years. By investing in and supporting our police and by working to reduce reoffending, we will aim to ensure that the level of crime continues to fall.

The final issue that I will talk about today is community empowerment. We gain significant social and economic benefits by giving people more control over the decisions that affect them. Over the next year, we will continue to support community land purchases, working towards our target of one million acres of land in community ownership by 2020. We will also consult on how communities can benefit from the devolution of the management of Crown Estate assets to Scotland. We will introduce an islands bill to ensure that our future policies and legislation take account of the needs of our 93 island communities.

We will implement and build on the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. Secondary legislation to establish a register of controlling interest in

ownership will be introduced over the next year, heralding unprecedented transparency around land ownership in Scotland. The Scottish land commission will become operational in April, and it will advise on issues relating to land ownership and provide an expert source of evidence for future reform.

Finally, we will work with local councils and communities on extending community budgeting and develop new legislation to further decentralise budgets and powers. We want Scotland to be a country where community ownership is desirable and viable and where community-led action is celebrated. I believe that this programme for government will help us to achieve that.

I turn briefly to the EU. Sixty-two per cent of those who voted in Scotland voted to remain in the EU, and that is why I am determined to pursue all options to protect our place in Europe. As I said at the outset of my statement, I will update Parliament more fully tomorrow. However, in order to ensure that all options are open to us, the programme for government makes it clear that we will consult on a draft referendum bill so that it is ready for immediate introduction if we conclude that independence is the best or only way to protect Scotland's interests.

I said at the beginning of my statement that this is a new Parliament, with new powers, operating in a new constitutional context. We also have a new domestic political context in our national Parliament, with a social democratic Government in the mainstream of Scottish public opinion confronted by a right-wing Conservative Opposition. That means a real battle of ideas; a sense of solidarity versus the ideology of the small state; a Scottish social security system with dignity at its heart, not crude attacks on the vulnerable; and a commitment to fair work, not a deregulated race to the bottom.

The programme for government demonstrates how, with an iron focus on the business of government, we will create opportunity for all. It outlines how we will support economic growth, invest in childcare and schools, improve public services and empower our local communities. It explains how we will use our substantial mandate to deliver on our manifesto commitments. The programme for government will help to create a wealthier and fairer country, and I am proud to commend it to Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the First Minister for her statement.

Programme for Government 2016-17

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We move to the open debate and I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I also ask all members to show the same courtesy to the leaders of the other parties as we did to the First Minister and not to interrupt their opening speeches. I call Ruth Davidson.

14:46

Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): Thank you for remembering my name, Presiding Officer. I was a bit worried for a second. I also thank the First Minister for early sight of her statement today.

Last week, I had the pleasure of visiting the Southside general practice in my constituency of Edinburgh Central. I sat down with the two general practitioner partners and discussed the problems that they are facing. Ever-increasing demands on their time and pressure on funding meant that they had taken the hard decision to hand their practice back for it to be taken over by the local health board. With the building due to be sold next year, they were worried that the practice would be broken up and that the thousands of patients whom it has served for decades would be tossed to the four winds. The doctors fear that they will be some of the first of a large number of GPs who are feeling that they have no option but to do the same. Those women are deeply committed to their job and they are deeply frustrated at a system that is not working for them.

If there is one priority that the Parliament faces as we get back to work today, it is surely to spend 100 per cent of our time on issues like this, on people who want to contribute and want to get on and are looking for the Government to help them, and for the service providers across the land who find that their jobs are getting harder, the support is getting less, and the centre cannot hold.

It is time for a Government and Parliament that deal with the real and present problems that we face: the challenges that are faced by doctors in general practice, a profession that cannot find staff because one in four training posts is lying vacant; the challenges that are faced by an education system that is still failing to give our poorest communities a real ladder of opportunity; or the immediate problems that we see in our economy, which can too easily feed through to fewer jobs and reduced quality of life for many.

It is up to us to act. There is a bulging in-tray for the Government to address that requires all of its

attention right now. I will set out today what I believe are the right priorities for Scotland and how we will act in opposition to the SNP Government during the coming year.

First, I read in last weekend's press that the economy was to be the First Minister's priority. She is right to make it so, even if the evidence of her Government suggests otherwise. Growth in Scotland is already faltering. The oil price crash has hit us hard. Added to that, we know that there will be an impact on the economy because of the EU referendum. We do not know the scale of that but, as the Prime Minister said at the weekend, we should prepare for difficult times ahead.

I do not try to downplay the significance of the referendum decision for one moment, and I know that many people in Scotland remain worried about the future. However, I do not subscribe to the view that we are helpless to act in the face of Brexit, nor do I think that breaking up a union that is worth four times more to Scotland than the EU will help matters very much. What I propose are practical steps that we can take in this Parliament to help us to ride out the uncertainty and emerge stronger.

In areas where there is common ground, we want to work constructively with the Scottish Government to improve legislation. In the First Minister's statement, that includes a new manufacturing institute, investment in research and development and the decommissioning plan. Members on the Conservative benches also want to reform air passenger duty, but we believe in a more tailored approach than a blanket 50 per cent reduction could ever achieve. We will also need to work out what impact that reduction would have on the climate change targets, which have been emphasised in the Government's new climate change bill that was announced today.

However, the First Minister's team will not be surprised to learn that we do not see a huge amount of scope over the coming year for SNP-Conservative consensus on the economic path forward. Overall, on the economy, I am left disappointed by the SNP's failure to listen. For example, only yesterday, 13 of Scotland's leading trade bodies wrote to the Scottish Government over its decision to charge firms higher rates here than those that are charged in England. They pointed out that one in eight commercial premises in Scotland is paying more simply for the privilege of being based north of the border. There was a time when the SNP saw the unfairness of that. The former finance secretary declared that

"putting Scottish business at a competitive disadvantage ... is a danger that must be avoided."

Now, the cash grab of the large business supplement means that thousands of firms have that danger brought to their door.

It does not require another of the SNP's commissions or talking shops to see the problem. The SNP is quite simply sending out a message that this is a place that does not support employers but punishes them. That is a mistake that the SNP is making with families, too.

As the First Minister rightly stated, for the first time, this Parliament will set new income tax bands and rates for the coming year—a reform that I heartily welcome. However, pushing income tax rates above levels in the rest of the UK will not help Scottish growth; it will hinder it. The priority should be to grow the number of taxpayers in Scotland, not to squeeze ever more money from an ever-smaller number.

The economic priority, in short, should be to send out a different message to that which the SNP cleaves to—not a message that piles further uncertainty on top of uncertainty and charges people more in the meantime, but one that unambiguously states that Scotland is going for growth.

Here I confess to a little more frustration with the Scottish Government's efforts. Elsewhere in the UK, politicians who—like the First Minister and like me—did not support the decision to leave the EU are putting aside their own disappointment at the result in an effort to try to make a crack of it. By contrast, our own Scottish Government's response was to release a risible fag-packet calculation of costs, purely to try to hide the facts surrounding Scotland's own deficit. Elsewhere in the UK, the message goes out that we are open for business; here in Scotland, the message is that we will make you pay. Surely it is time for a bit more foresight. Surely it is time for an ambitious and positive economic policy that sells Scotland as the place that we all know it to be—the best place to live and work anywhere in the United Kingdom.

I said two weeks ago that I wanted a new type of Scottish Government and what I meant was this: I want a Government that no longer asks, "How will this boost independence?" but one that asks, "How are we growing the country?" In the past few weeks, we have suggested a few ways to do just that: a greater footprint for Scottish Development International so that it can sell Scottish goods more effectively abroad; an acceleration in the broadband programme for our rural areas so that everyone can get access to superfast broadband, not just those who live in the central belt; and real support for innovation in cutting edge renewables.

In our manifesto, we also outlined plans to create a network of regeneration zones to attract

businesses into some of the most deprived areas in our towns and cities. We proposed the creation of a dedicated enterprise agency for the south of Scotland to mirror the remit and work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has seen fit to back some of those ideas, but we will continue to push for more.

As regards the Scottish growth scheme, we on this side of the chamber will always work to champion Scottish business and growth but we will seek further detail and input on the mechanics of the scheme before the Government can be assured of our support.

We want to see the Scottish Government putting its own money to work in a way that benefits all. For example, the Scottish Government's capital budget is set to rise by 14 per cent over the coming spending period. Our priority is to see that extra money being put into a major new investment in home efficiency, far beyond the scope of that which was outlined today. That will reduce our rates of fuel poverty, cut bills for families, improve the health of our nation and create thousands of new jobs, thereby ensuring that the money that we pay into Government helps to support our wider economic future. Now that the Scottish Government has accepted the principle, we will push it into greater ambition with the delivery.

At the same time, we urge the Scottish Government to simplify planning and regulation to help to support a genuinely ambitious house building programme for homes of all types—that means social and affordable homes, but it means private homes, too. House building and house improvement have to be at the top of the agenda, but helping people to buy their property must be part of that mix. The land and buildings transaction tax continues to stifle sections of the housing market and must be reformed, while the roll-out of the additional dwelling supplement has been a total boorach, with people facing vague and conflicting information from solicitors, estate agents and even Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs on rules for payment.

All those measures are important, but the single biggest economic lever that the SNP could pull right now to help this country grow would be to remove the threat of a second referendum. That is what is holding us back and stifling investment in our firms. Taking away that lead weight on our country's prospects is one thing that the First Minister could do today. She might have hidden that in a throwaway line at the end of her speech, but the bill sits on page 7 of the programme for government, as a direct threat to our nation's economic growth.

I turn to other areas that the First Minister mentioned. There was a time—a golden age—when she said that education was her top priority and, for about six days, people actually believed her. There is now a clear parliamentary majority here to give more power and control to school leaders, so we will use our position as the main Opposition party to ensure that reforms are fast tracked and are genuine. Reform should not be used as a way of replacing one form of remote control with an even more centralised version. Local school leaders should have real controls that make a genuine difference. We also need new ways of attracting the best and brightest into teaching and into our schools—I have previously made the case in the chamber for a Teach First scheme.

Reforming Scottish education has been our priority for years, so it is good to see the Scottish Government catching up. However, as we reform, it is important that we measure the progress that we make. I repeat my call for the Government to re-enter Scotland into all the main international education comparison tests. If a commitment to improvement is real, the Government has nothing to fear from it being measured.

We agree that more priority should be given to improving childcare services across Scotland and we want more of that money to be directed to children at the earliest stages of life. However, the Scottish Government needs to examine the way that childcare is delivered. As we learned recently from the parents group fair funding for our kids, in many cases, parents cannot take up the childcare that they are entitled to because there are not funded places when they need it. As we have consistently said, it is vital that the Scottish Government recognises the need to organise childcare around parents' needs, not the needs of the bodies that provide the funding.

At the other end of the scale, it is surely time that the Scottish Government repaired some of the damage that it has inflicted on our college sector over the past nine years. We have had to stand here and watch a fall of 152,000 college places while at the same time employers tell us that the lack of skills in the workplace is now their most pressing problem. Headline-grabbing spending pledges may look swanky etched in stone, but surely it is time for the Scottish Government to put aside self-congratulation and get on with helping those who need it, because this Government has gutted our colleges.

The education secretary will not have his troubles to seek in delivering on many of his Government's commitments, but let me suggest that he does one thing to make his life easier, which is to clear the Government's disastrous named person scheme from his desk and start

afresh, this time with something that is not unlawful.

We welcome the fact that a new social security bill is to be published and that a new department is to be created to take on the vital task of delivering new welfare powers. Among those new powers, the Parliament will be able to create new benefits in devolved areas and top up UK-wide benefits, including universal credit, tax credits and child benefit. I hope that that will start a new phase in the Scottish Government's approach to welfare—one that involves spending less time complaining about UK Government policy and more time spelling out what it intends to do with the powers that it now has.

We should include a dedicated employment programme for disabled people and a clear ambition to halve the disability employment gap. Only today, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has given us a timely reminder of the need for a long-term plan to tackle the scourge of poverty. More than anything, we need to use the powers of the Parliament to act early. We spend millions on the consequences of family breakdown, addiction, unemployment and more. We must focus on ways to prevent that breakdown instead.

In our health service, too, we need a similar approach of trying to deal with the social problems that we face rather than just paying for the consequences. Doctors leaders spoke out just days ago, saying that they are flat on their faces because of the pressures that the NHS is facing through a combination of increased demand, increased expectation and funding pressures. As we spelled out in our manifesto, we support extra funding for health budgets across Scotland, but better thinking is required too. Therefore, as we outlined last week, more of the funding pot must now go to general practice. A target of at least 10 per cent by 2020 is the right one. It is not only GPs who support such a shift, but accident and emergency doctors and paramedics, who know that it will take pressure off their services. Shifting resources to primary care, combined with our proposed network of recovery centres, could significantly improve accident and emergency waiting times.

On policing, I welcome the domestic abuse bill that the First Minister outlined and promise positive engagement from my party on it. However, I express real, serious and genuine concern about the railway policing bill. Police Scotland is under immense stress and pressure to operate as effectively as all members would wish it to, and British Transport Police officers have raised objections and concerns regarding their specialist role being absorbed into the centralised force. We back the British Transport Police and ask the Government to think again.

There is plenty on which Scotland needs to focus, but I am frustrated that, rather than the Scottish Government being prepared to do that, its energies are too often diverted into an endless political campaign. The First Minister's statement today summed that up: it contained plenty of legislation but it was all just served as a warm-up to the attempt to nudge the independence caravan another few inches down the road.

Instead of a coherent vision setting out a long-term direction of travel, the Government simply trots out a shopping list of legislation that fails to hang together. Our vision is for a Government that helps people to get by and get on, that makes economic growth its priority so that we can fund our public services and that believes our best interests are served by respecting the decision to stay within the United Kingdom so that we can get on with our lives and move on. It is hard to spot that unifying vision in today's programme for government. Instead, the Government seems more focused on clearing up past mistakes than setting a course for the country's future. The conclusion that many people will draw is that the SNP cupboard is bare except for the only idea that the party has ever had: to split up the UK.

At the end of her speech, the First Minister sought to create a dividing line between our two parties. There is plenty on which we disagree, but the real dividing line in this country is between the SNP, which is desperate to drag us back to a second independence referendum, and the rest of us, who all just want to put it behind us and move on.

As we said in the election campaign, we will provide a strong Opposition to the SNP Government. Today's programme for government only shows up the need for a strong alternative, which we will provide.

15:02

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the First Minister for advance sight of her statement and I welcome her—and, indeed, all members—back to the chamber. However, before I begin my response to the programme for government, I cannot let one of Ruth Davidson's last remarks go unchecked. The barefaced cheek of the Tories in saying that the Government must do more for disabled people is outrageous. Every year that Ruth Davidson's party has been in government, it has attacked the rights and opportunities of disabled people. It must stop.

A year ago, during my last response to a programme for government, and when the Parliament met to elect the First Minister in May, I said that my party would provide constructive and progressive opposition. Where there are areas on

which Labour agrees with the Government, it will be happy to provide support. Therefore, I welcome the Government's decision to introduce a social security bill so that we can begin to make use of the substantial powers that we have to protect people from Tory welfare reforms.

I also welcome the proposed domestic abuse bill, which I hope will go some way towards dealing with coercive and controlling behaviour and bring more such cases to justice. However, earlier this summer, I visited Edinburgh rape crisis centre and I say to the First Minister that, as much as the domestic abuse bill will be very welcome news to it, the centre wants to hear from the Government a promise of consistent, three-year funding and an end to the local government cuts that leave it feeling unstable week in and week out.

I also welcome the proposed gender balance on public boards bill. That very welcome measure is one that Labour members have championed for a long time. I hope that the First Minister will redouble her commitment to the women 50:50 campaign, and I encourage her to do so. That campaign would see us deliver a 50:50 Parliament.

This is the tenth programme for government that an SNP Government has put before this Parliament and although there is much that we can welcome in it, including action on fuel poverty, here is what disappoints me: although, over the past decade, this Parliament has become more and more powerful, the Government's programme has become less and less ambitious. It seems that the more powers are passed to this place, the more reluctant the Government has been to use them.

If we look behind the rhetoric that the First Minister used today, we can see that the sum total of this tenth programme for government is 12 bills that lack ambition. Take one policy area in particular: education. The First Minister said that education is her priority. When she launched her manifesto, she said that it was her driving ambition. The Deputy First Minister has travelled Scotland telling people that change is coming. However, today, we see that there is yet more delay: it will be another year before this Parliament will see an education bill; and it will be March before new mechanisms for school funding will be consulted on. That sums up this programme for government: it does not address the big questions that our country faces. How do we create a health service that is fit for the future? How can we use the new powers over employability to get people back to work? What action can we take to grow our economy so that everyone benefits and we can close that £15 billion gap in our public finances? All of those questions demand bold and

radical action from the Scottish Government, not more of the same.

Across Scotland, our public services are showing strain that we can no longer ignore. Why? Because Tory cuts, passed on by the SNP, are having a direct and real impact on the lives of people across this country. Our schools and colleges have seen cuts to their budgets, removing important life chances from the poorest students. Just two weeks ago, Audit Scotland reported a 48 per cent decline in part-time college students on this Government's watch, an impact that will be felt mostly by women and those over 25. Today, the very support staff who support some of the people who are furthest from the labour market in education are out on strike over these cuts.

In our national health service, services that the First Minister said were secure are now under threat because of the budget cuts that health boards are having to deal with. In Paisley, where the children's ward is facing closure, the First Minister denied that there were any proposals for the ward to be axed, but that is now exactly what is being proposed. In Inverclyde, where the maternity service is at risk, the First Minister made a direct appeal to people less than a year ago, saying that there was "no substance" to those fears and that

"There are no plans to centralise services out of Inverclyde."

Yet, a year—and an election—later, that is exactly what is happening.

In public transport, our bus services are still patchwork, leaving too many communities isolated. The flagship upgrade to the main rail line between Glasgow and Edinburgh is seven months overdue and millions of pounds over budget. Further, major programmes to upgrade infrastructure, including roads, are not going far enough and risk not only creating inconvenience but holding back our economic growth.

The First Minister and the SNP have had nearly a decade, and now they have another five years. Let this be the five years when focusing on jobs, public services and our economy rank as highly as the SNP's fight for independence. It is not too much to ask for the First Minister to put as much focus on those issues in government as she did in her manifesto. Only 209 of the 24,000 words in the SNP's manifesto were about a second referendum. The vast majority of Scots, and even many of those who voted yes in 2014, want that same proportionate focus. Why would we take our country down a path that exposes us to an economic reality that would mean even more savage cuts to our public services when we currently benefit from being part of a redistributive

union that sees Scots benefit from £1,200 more in public spending than the UK average? However, the Government has made it clear today that it is drafting a bill for a second independence referendum. Let me be absolutely clear: the First Minister will find no support on these benches for a second independence referendum.

The First Minister also has to be clearer about what she wants to achieve as Britain faces the prospect of Brexit. At the beginning of the summer, a second referendum was "highly likely"; on Friday, it was "an option"; and, yesterday, she offered support to Tory ministers who want a soft Brexit and to keep us in the single market.

Labour will continue to make the argument that we have made since the EU referendum, which is that we are better maintaining our relationship with the EU and continuing as part of the United Kingdom. That is the will of the people of Scotland on both issues and it is a will that my party shares.

This Parliament has more powers available to it than ever before. That is why, last week, Labour set out an ambitious alternative to the programme for government—13 bills for a fairer and more equal Scotland. Every one of those bills was backed up by a pledge to stop the cuts and end the austerity budgets that have come from this SNP Government. We would do that by using the tax powers of this Parliament. In education, instead of asking councils to raise the funds to narrow the gap in our schools then clawing it back, we would raise taxes on the top 1 per cent of earners—people earning more than £150,000 a year—and give the money directly to headteachers to help disadvantaged children. That is our priority—to raise taxes on the most well-off to pay for schools.

In comparison, the only tax proposal from the Scottish Government today—in fact, in the first bill in the legislative programme—is a tax cut. It is not a tax cut for the poorest or most disadvantaged but a tax cut to reduce air fares and remove £270 million from the Scottish economy. Mark my words: a social democratic Government does not cut taxes on the rich; it does not refuse to ask the 1 per cent to pay their fair share; and it certainly does not give a handout to those at the top when everyone else is being asked to face cuts.

These 13 bills in Labour's alternative programme for government represent a bold and radical plan to use the powers of this Parliament to respond to the concerns of people across our country, and they would create real and lasting change. I would be happy to see any of them adopted by the SNP Government because—make no mistake—minority government means that we need to work together in this place. In that, the Government faces a choice: it can look left, and join with like-minded and progressive forces; or it

can look right, and make an alliance with a Tory Opposition with no plan to take this country forward.

15:12

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the First Minister for the advance copy of her statement. It contains many elements that I am happy to welcome—and not just positive individual policy measures such as gender equality on public boards and action on child poverty. Let me respond to some of the closing comments in the First Minister's statement. If the story of this session of Parliament turns out to be one about a genuine commitment to "social solidarity" versus the right wing

"ideology of the small state",

I would welcome that. Let me say to those who responded with some scepticism to those words: let us take that as a positive signal that it is our job to hold the Government to account on those words and to ensure that the First Minister delivers.

This third successive term of SNP Government is, no doubt, an exciting time for the First Minister. She has been in the job for nearly two years, but this is the first time that she has set out her own programme for government following an election—an election in which she secured, by some way, the largest number of MSPs for any party. It is, without question, an enviable position. All of us in other political parties recognise that.

The First Minister described the mandate that she has been given. She claimed that people have "endorsed" the SNP's "policy programme". It is important to remember that, despite the strong largest-minority position that the SNP occupies, it is still a minority Government. This session will need to be one of compromise and open-minded discussion. There will, as ever, be times along the way when the Scottish Green Party will work constructively, perhaps even to improve Government proposals, and there will be times when we must oppose the Government.

The complex new challenges that are coming to this Parliament, and the profound economic and political uncertainty that have arisen from the EU referendum result—not only from the result but from the fundamental dishonesty of the Brexit campaigners and the utterly and bafflingly incoherent position so far of the UK Government—mean that these are fundamentally challenging times for any Scottish Government. As I put on the record before the summer recess, it is clear that all options to represent and respect Scotland's strong remain vote must remain on the table. I must say that it is risible to suggest that either we or Nicola Sturgeon are somehow trying to hide the view that

independence remains a choice that the Scottish people have a right to make, if they so decide.

The new challenges exist against a backdrop of significant existing challenges, including work towards a fairer, more equal and healthier society, which has not been achieved on the scale that any of us wish for by whichever political party has been in power; the building of an economy that works for everyone in society; and the coming to terms with our environmental limits. That is why I was slightly amazed that the first bill that the First Minister chose to mention was her proposed bill to scrap air passenger duty. The case against that policy is very strong not only in environmental terms, but in social justice terms. Even if the tax giveaway for the airlines is handed on to individual passengers, the lion's share of that benefit will go to the wealthiest frequent flyers—and that would be at a time when the public transport that people depend on daily is eye-wateringly expensive. Even Ruth Davidson suggests that we might need to work out what impact the policy would have on our climate change targets. Well, we might need to do that if we had not already done it; halving APD would increase our emissions by up to 60 kilotonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year, and there is no way around that.

The climate change bill that the First Minister mentioned must achieve what the last one failed to achieve. I take my share of responsibility for that failure, because I was one of the MSPs who scrutinised that bill. It did not, as it should have done, act as a provocation to push Government policy in a new and ambitious direction. The new climate change bill must do that, and not just set targets.

The required investment that will be made in the energy efficiency national infrastructure priority clearly looks like an improvement on the past two years, but that is after a reduction in last year's budget for that measure. If we are going to give effect to the ambition that is required, it is clear that we need to hold the First Minister to a higher bar when we look at the budget.

I will mention, in passing, the budget bill. The First Minister says that it will be introduced later in the year; there is an important question about how much later in the year it will be introduced. There is a real need for robust scrutiny of the minority Government. I give the First Minister credit where it is due for changing her position on the role of parliamentary liaison officers in committees, for example, because it is important to send the public a clear signal that they can have confidence in the robustness of scrutiny in Parliament. That applies to the budget bill, as well. If our committees' responsibility to look at the budget is reduced to a one-meeting process, that simply will not be adequate.

The First Minister put a great deal of emphasis on the need for business support—new measures including public investment and support for areas such as manufacturing. Fundamentally, that must operate not in a silo away from the climate change and sustainability agenda. If we truly want to build a sustainable economy that operates successfully to meet people's needs within environmental limits, we cannot have manufacturing policy, oil and gas policy or anything else making the problems of climate change worse, while in the next office officials scratch their heads about how to reduce emissions. The agendas must be pursued in a united and coherent way.

Public investment in the economy has an important role to play. To offer true value, investment of public money has to be seen not just in terms of business support, exports or gross domestic product. We need to be looking at areas such as employee ownership, ethical business and tax compliance if we want to see the maximum benefit for our society from that public investment. We have welcomed the measures that have been taken so far in inclusive growth and the fair work agenda, but we have also said that they need to go further. If we are still merely encouraging businesses to take up the business pledge, rather than putting in genuine disincentives for those that fail to comply, we will not see that progress.

There need to be similar connections between economic and employment policy and the social security policy that is developed, given that most people who engage with social security are in work. The Greens have already proposed constructive ideas for preventing the worst of the UK's sanctioning regime from impacting on people in Scotland by ensuring that the newly devolved employment programmes do not hand over information that would be used for that purpose. I genuinely hope that the First Minister will look favourably on that proposal.

I will certainly welcome the child poverty bill, but again we need to go further than merely setting statutory targets. We have seen with fuel poverty targets that targets alone are not enough, especially in areas in which devolved and reserved competences interact and may come into conflict.

I welcome the emphasis on the costs of childcare, but we should expand from that to look at the wider costs of education and the school day, from the costs of uniforms to travel and extracurricular activities.

The attainment fund will have strong cross-party support for action, but we will argue that national policies must be funded from national resources and not from a raid on local taxation.

That brings me to something that is missing: there is no coherent plan to do what the commission on local tax reform proposed, which was to scrap the council tax and replace it with something better. Tweaks of a decades-old system will not be enough. The Greens will continue to press the case for radical reform of taxation policy at local and national levels.

If we do things creatively with the bold intention not just to fund services but to close the wealth gap in our society, we will in this session of Parliament do something dramatic that will give effect to the First Minister's words about an agenda of social solidarity against the right-wing agenda of the small state that we see elsewhere.

15:21

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the First Minister for an advance copy of her statement.

I want the Parliament to make Scotland the best again so that everyone can have the opportunity to succeed no matter what their background is; people can live as they wish as long as it does not cause harm to others; and we pass on the planet in a better state than we found it in. Those are the fundamental principles on which I will address the coming parliamentary year.

We must deliver a step change in mental health services so that they are treated on a par with physical illness services and we must deliver policies that enable us to exceed our climate change targets. We should make Scottish education the best again, but we need to make a transformational investment for that to happen. We need to guarantee our civil liberties, as well.

I intend to use the Parliament to provide a clear, hopeful, optimistic, moderate and progressive voice. In a no-borders approach, we will oppose independence and support strong relations with Europe.

Just because the First Minister comes before Parliament to protest that she really does care about the day job, it does not mean that she really cares about it. Day after day and week after week over the summer, she did not focus on that job but made speech after speech about independence. Before the summer, I genuinely hoped that she meant what she said about a broad consensus on Brexit and I hoped that she would act in the interests of the country and not just in the interests of the SNP. However, she has trashed that consensus with her actions.

Today, the First Minister comes before us all innocent, pretending that she did not do that all summer. The First Minister on independence is like a school pupil caught smoking, who emerges

from behind the bike sheds with plumes of smoke, a packet of filter tips in her pocket and breath like an ashtray. “But Miss,” she complains, “you are the only person talking about smoking.”

In a desperate bid to resurrect the impression of consensus this week, the First Minister claimed that she was reaching out—wait for this—to the Conservatives in London to form a coalition. That is a brilliant idea. That has worked before. Who would have believed it? I do not, and I do not think that anyone else does either. The First Minister should ditch the charade and her new plans for independence. That would be the best thing for Scotland.

The blow of Brexit and the threat of another independence referendum mean that divisive constitutional politics remain at the centre of our national debate. A dismal scene has been visited upon us by the Conservatives and the SNP. We need progressive, moderate, optimistic and hopeful voices that advance a no-borders approach for the UK and for Europe. If we leave the campaign for Scotland’s place in the United Kingdom to the Conservatives, it will fail; if we leave progressive politics to the SNP, that will fail, too.

If members look at the so-called social democratic record, it is not as rosy as the First Minister claims. In June, the number of GPs in post dropped by a further 90. There has also been a shortfall in the take-up of GP training places. It makes a nonsense of the First Minister’s continued claim that the problem can be solved by creating more training places if we cannot fill the ones that we already have. More than a quarter of GP training places are unfilled, a larger proportion than were unfilled last year. The Royal College of General Practitioners warns that 830 GPs will be needed by 2020. Last year, the figure was 740. The situation is getting worse under this Administration.

On climate change, the Scottish Government is still nailed to the fence on fracking; it will not commit. Its position makes no one happy. The SNP should take a stand against the new frontier of fossil fuels that fracking represents. It should cancel its plans to add 60,000 tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere through tax cuts for the aviation industry through air passenger duty. There is little point in setting new, bold targets if the action that is taken undermines those targets. I propose a warm homes act, low-carbon transport and no opencast coal so we can deliver real change.

On civil liberties, we still have not heard the Scottish Government finally cancel the intrusive super-ID database. It is time to bring it to an end. We have been waiting 560 days for that decision; now is the day to chuck it out. We need to bring

back democracy to our police. That is the best way of connecting them to our communities.

The Scottish Government delayed the education attainment figures until after the election. The number of pupils performing well in numeracy at primary 4 has dropped, and no progress has been made on tackling the problems in other age groups, too. On the attainment gap, more than 2,000 schools across Scotland are missing out on support under the SNP’s funding scheme.

The Scottish Government’s performance was found wanting when the education secretary delivered his curriculum guidance to teachers 10 days after they had started the autumn term. Audit Scotland’s report has shown that 40 per cent of part-time college places have been scrapped under the SNP.

On early education and childcare, the Scottish Government has still not given the necessary assurances to parents about when—wherever they live—they can expect to access their free places for three to five-year-olds. We need to remember that this Government promised that nearly 30 per cent of parents of two-year-olds would have a place but delivered only to 7 per cent of such parents.

Attainment, early education and colleges can be tackled by serious and committed investment in education. What is the Government’s answer in its programme for government? It has a limited attainment fund, a review of the funding formula—that is radical—and a return to Thatcherite national testing. We should be investing in schools, colleges and nurseries with a penny on income tax. That is the way to make radical change.

This Government does not, has not and will not take mental health seriously. We get 22 words on that in today’s speech. The strategy lapsed last year, nothing has been put in its place since and today’s numbers on mental health show that the price is being paid by hundreds of teenagers who have to wait more than a year for treatment—indeed, last year, 237 teenagers waited more than a year for treatment. Things are getting worse. I propose extra resources: for primary care, so that mental health professionals can work alongside GPs; for work in accident and emergency and in partnership with the police; and to create extra capacity in child and adolescent services.

I do not know what more we need to do to persuade this Government that mental health is the route through which everyone can participate in our society and economy. Tackling mental health issues is the way to take pressure off GPs and the rest of the health service and to get everyone to reach their full potential. Mental health cannot take another year of second-rate ranking in the Government’s programme.

On the economy, the long-term future for Scotland should be high-skilled, high-wage jobs. That will be achieved by investment in education. Given that the most recent Scottish GDP figures show 0 per cent growth, now is the time to take the matter seriously—we need action. The Scottish Government's ridiculous position that capital spending delayed from last year can be badged as "accelerated funding" shows the nonsense of its economic policy.

There was no mention in the statement of the delay to the construction of the Queensferry crossing. There was no mention of the £15 billion deficit that was identified in the most recent "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland" figures. There was no mention of the lost contract in relation to the Janice platform, which is going to Norway, and no mention of the oil decommissioning jobs that are being lost to overseas yards. What is the point of having a decommissioning action plan if there is no action?

The Government is so wedded to the cause of independence that it has taken its eye off the ball. It has had nine years in power but it is acting as if it has just taken over. No one will be fooled by that. It is about time that the Government changed its ways, so that we can deliver change for Scotland and be the best again.

15:31

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I pay tribute to the First Minister—I think that Willie Rennie meant to do that but forgot—for setting out a vision for Scotland through a bold, progressive, transformative programme for government. The programme is ambitious and outward looking.

The Government will govern for all in Scotland; the programme has people at its core, with opportunities for everyone and not just the select few. I will focus on that in my speech.

Despite the major upheaval since the EU referendum, this Government has stayed the course, providing leadership in circumstances when that was needed most. That is demonstrated by the support for our business sector that was announced today. It is my continuing aim to provide such leadership for the people of Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse.

The Government will continue to be at the forefront of transformative politics, so that we give our constituents every opportunity to participate in civic life. We pledge to empower those who have felt ignored or shunned by society and successive UK Governments. We are endeavouring to create a society that has tolerance, respect and dignity at its heart. That is why the Government has reaffirmed its support for the one in five campaign,

in addition to creating the democratic participation fund, to widen access to politics for those with a disability. Access to politics should not be an exclusive, closed-doors club, and this Government is offering solutions that promote inclusivity in local government.

Those pledges represent not tokenism or lip-service to the disabled community but transformative politics in action. Our vision is to ensure that barriers to participation are broken down and that people who want to make a difference in local government can do so without discrimination or fear. That is about much more than money; it is about opportunity.

Let us think about the opportunities that our Paralympians will face when they start their endeavours tomorrow. Some of them lost their mobility cars due to Ruth Davidson's party's policies in government—it is an absolute travesty when that party's members talk about caring for people with disabilities.

Our vision is one of opportunities for all, regardless of background or circumstance. Scotland stands proud as a nation that values its diversity. We are a country that believes in the principles of its people and regards us as all equal.

Equality and inclusivity are two fundamental principles that underpin this Government's vision for the future. To achieve true equality and inclusivity, education is vital. To that end, it is time for inclusive education. It is time to stand shoulder to shoulder with the time for inclusive education—TIE—campaign and organisations such as LGBT Youth Scotland, to reinforce what we in Scotland already know: we are all one people, with the same rights.

Scotland leads the way on protecting people's rights, despite the best efforts of the Conservative Party—despite that party's callous attempts to curb workers' rights through the anti-trade union bill, which the Scottish Government has pledged to resist, and despite its unrelenting pursuit of withdrawal from the European convention on human rights, its so-called repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998 and its regressive steps towards creating a so-called British bill of rights.

The Scottish Government has worked tirelessly to protect the rights of all its people, which include the rights that are afforded to us as members of the European Union. Those rights face an uncertain future, to say the least. While ill-equipped Conservative MPs dig their way out of a mess that is of their own creation—apparently, the situation is quite straightforward but complex at the same time—ordinary people are bearing the brunt.

If Brexit truly means Brexit, can Conservative Party members say that rights such as those

under the EU pregnant workers directive, which guarantees the right to paid time off for antenatal appointments, are really safe in their hands? Are rights under the directives against domestic violence safe in the Conservatives' hands? The answer is very unclear, so I welcome the domestic abuse bill, which will be a step forward and which many members across the chamber have campaigned for many years for.

Let me be undeniably clear. Under the Scottish Government, the European convention on human rights will be upheld. The Human Rights Act 1998 is fundamentally written into the Scotland Act 1998. This Parliament, and not Westminster, will be the decision makers. This Scottish Government, and not the Conservatives, will protect human rights; we will not replace those rights with something that is lacking.

We face uncertain times and a precarious political landscape. The fallout from Brexit remains greatly concerning—especially given the glacial reaction of the Conservative Westminster Government—but the Scottish Government has done what it was elected to do, which is to govern.

We have led by example where others have faltered. As I said, we want to foster an inclusive society, and this Government has put its words into action. Our 50:50 gender-balanced Cabinet reaffirms the Government's commitment to 50:50 representation by 2020 on public boards, councils and even right here in this place.

I am sure that, like me, many members across the chamber will welcome the Government's bill to achieve gender balance on public boards. That is a policy whose time has come. I ask members across the chamber to work collectively towards that goal and to ensure that the terms "glass ceiling" and "sticky floor" are consigned to history textbooks. The measures to tackle pregnancy and maternity discrimination and to support women to return to the workplace after they have had children are another superb announcement that I am glad to hear.

The Government was elected to govern for all throughout Scotland. It will strive to ensure that the chamber is representative of homes and workplaces up and down the country. Scotland will continue to be a country where ambition is limited only by someone's imagination. There remains plenty of work to do, but members should make no mistake that the Government will rise to the challenge. We have a social security bill, a child poverty bill, a warmer homes initiative and a housing bill. I look forward to playing a full and active role in meeting the challenge in order to create a nation that is for all and not just for the few.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I remind members that we are tight for time and that they have up to, not over, six minutes for speeches.

15:38

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I turn immediately to the education section of the statement. The First Minister has said that the narrowing of the attainment gap will define her Government, and there is therefore an accompanying focus on literacy and numeracy. As Ruth Davidson said, the Scottish Conservatives have a strong and consistent record on demanding action in that field. We contend that the SNP cannot fully deliver unless important reforms are made.

I will put the situation in the context of the main interpretations of the recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on Scottish schools, which praised many elements of Scottish education but also raised significant concerns about where we lag behind. Like several key education experts in Scotland, the report states that, although there is common ground on the overarching aims of excellence and equity, there is no clarity of purpose about how the aims will be achieved.

The report praises the ambition to improve standards of literacy and numeracy and welcomes the renewed focus on that in teacher training, which we believe is crucial. However, it then points to failings within the curriculum for excellence guidance, which is confused, obsessed with additional assessment that has little scholastic meaning and so full of jargon that teachers do not know where they stand.

John Swinney was right to make the changes that he announced last week. I hope that he recognises that those changes are necessary not because teachers have made mistakes but because the education agencies in Scotland—Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and others—as directed by the Scottish Government have been found wanting when it comes to clarity of purpose regarding what is expected of our teachers. The Scottish Government was told that long ago by the Scottish Conservatives and many in education, and it is a great pity that it has taken this long for it to recognise the damage.

It is not enough just to say that we will reduce workloads; that can be done only if there is a genuine commitment to increasing teacher numbers. The cutbacks in local authorities have wreaked havoc with workforce planning, just as they have with the number of additional support

needs teachers, nursery teachers and classroom assistants. Last week, we saw the problems that are emerging in encouraging enough teachers to want to become heads. New school buildings are good and very much to be welcomed, but the staffing of those schools is just as important.

On the theme of clarity of purpose, let me deal with the issue of narrowing the attainment gap. We all know what we are trying to do, but doubt remains about exactly how the Scottish Government intends to measure progress towards that. In last week's letter to the Education and Skills Committee, John Swinney said that there is no single measure by which the attainment gap can be measured. That is true, but we need to know exactly what data is required to measure progress in attainment so that we can judge how well our schools are faring in basic literacy and numeracy.

At the Education and Skills Committee in June, the cabinet secretary said that he did not agree with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland's claim that sufficient data was available. I think that he is right, but he needs to tell us exactly what that data must be and how it will relate to the improvements that we want to make.

The First Minister was very specific in saying that she would talk about assessments, not tests. I ask the Scottish Government to explain exactly what is meant by that. In the published national improvement framework there is reference to high-stakes testing and examples are given from other countries. We are not clear at all about what is meant by assessment in the context of the Scottish Government wanting to introduce it, and we will not narrow the attainment gap unless we know exactly what we are measuring to establish what progress is being made. We cannot simply muddle along with weaker literacy and numeracy results, as has been the case for several decades. Teachers, parents and pupils need to see meaningful evidence of improving results.

One of the most interesting trends in Scottish education just now is the desire for greater autonomy and diversity of provision in education. The Scottish Government's panel of educational experts must surely have been telling the cabinet secretary that there is a strong link between autonomy and successful schools. I hope that that is the main reason for the forthcoming education bill.

The Conservatives want to see radical reform in this area of education to make it much more responsive to parental demand and to allow the professionalism and leadership of our headteachers and teachers to flourish to the full. The shackling, one-size-fits-all comprehensive state education system run exclusively by local authorities has had its day. It was founded on the

mistaken policy commitment whereby equality of opportunity and uniformity were seen as one and the same thing and able to deliver better results—they have not.

None of the above can be achieved unless there is a qualitative improvement in the early years. I accept entirely what the First Minister said about the need for a qualitative improvement.

I will conclude with some remarks about colleges and universities, both of which have had to endure an extremely tough time under the SNP, not just in financial terms but in wholesale restructuring. I recently saw an SNP statement that said it had a "strong record" on colleges. Well, the SNP should try telling that to anyone in the sector, because the rhetoric is simply not believed by anyone.

This time last year, we had to endure a completely unnecessary higher education bill that, I may say, lost the SNP many friends in the sector. This time, the proposal is about widening access. That is a laudable aim, but it is not going to be achieved unless the cabinet secretary is able to produce a greater number of university places that are properly funded and will not squeeze out students simply to ensure that 20 per cent of places are taken up by those from disadvantaged backgrounds. That is a major issue for the sector and one that is going to test the SNP to the full.

If education really is the centrepiece of the Government's programme, there is a monumental amount of work to be done to address the mistakes of the past nine years and to put Scottish education back where it belongs—leading the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: At some time somebody is going to speak for six minutes or less. I appreciate that it is only a few seconds over but, as those seconds mount up, it will mean that members at the end of the list lose their speaking time, and I do not want that to happen to anybody.

15:45

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I promise to do my best to stay within six minutes, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the economic measures in today's statement because, in the situation in which we find ourselves, the priorities for us all have to be jobs, growth and the economy. I particularly welcome the initiative of a new business guarantee scheme, as that potentially represents a substantial new additional investment of £0.5 billion over the next three years in small and medium-sized businesses, and it will be financed without taking resources from other essential services. I hope that Her Majesty's Treasury will

see the common sense in that and not just approve it but—it might want to do its usual—copy an innovative measure from this Government and this Parliament.

In developing the economic arguments in the statement, I would like to make four or five additional points that are behind the statement but not specified within it.

First, there is an immediate huge opportunity arising from the 10 per cent devaluation of the pound since the Brexit vote to give a major boost to certain sectors of the Scottish economy. That is irrespective of whether people support devaluation—Mervyn King recently said that he had spent 16 years at the Bank of England trying to bring about devaluation as the pound was grossly overvalued, which is one of the reasons that the UK has a record trade deficit and no prospect at the moment of being able to close it.

There are three opportunities arising from the devaluation. Number 1 is our ability to export much more to the rest of the world, because our goods and services are much more competitively priced. We have to have a new export drive to take advantage of that competitive pricing.

Secondly, there is an opportunity in some industries for more import substitution—to grow our own goods and services at home rather than rely on more expensive imports from abroad.

Thirdly, there is a major opportunity for the tourism sector. I strongly suggest that, along with the private sector, we look at the Californian model of funding tourism marketing both in Scotland and the UK, and internationally. The 10 per cent devaluation of the pound represents a major opportunity for a further boost to tourism in Scotland in the immediate period ahead, and we should not let that window of opportunity pass us by.

Exports of goods and services, import substitution and tourism: all of those areas can benefit from promotion by a proactive Government working with the industrial and private sectors.

We still have 143,000 unemployed people in Scotland, and that is the next area where some more urgent action should be taken. The Scottish Government has outlined many times that getting as many of those people as possible into work is a high priority. Side by side with the 143,000 unemployed people, we have some dire skills shortages in key sectors. We are short of 4,000 long-distance lorry drivers, and the sector is finding it difficult to recruit. Let us get those people off the bureau and train them for work as long-distance lorry drivers—4,000 jobs could be filled in the next few months with a proper drive to kill two birds with one stone.

We have a major skills shortage in the information technology sector—a major growth sector—because to keep up even with existing demand we need to produce 11,000 new IT graduates every year. We are way behind on that, so let us catch up and create real opportunities, particularly for our young people, in filling the jobs in the IT sector.

We have heard about skill shortages in the NHS and in teaching. A very good example of addressing that is the initiative in the north-east of Scotland where we are training and retraining unemployed people and people made redundant in the oil industry to become teachers and fill job vacancies in the teaching profession in maths, English and a range of other subjects. Let us make that not just a north-east initiative but an initiative in every sector where it is needed across the country.

Finally, I draw the Government's attention to the fact that it holds well over £500 million of its own capital in shared equity schemes across Scotland in housing. There is a way to recycle that money so that at least some of it can be reinvested in new house building on top of the existing budgets. I strongly urge the Government to look at how that can be done—and I am happy to show the Government how it can get that money reinvested to create new jobs across Scotland, so that we can give jobs to some of the 143,000 people who are unemployed and looking for and willing to work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are a star pupil, Mr Neil, as you finished exactly on six minutes. You made a job application as well.

15:51

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Today was an opportunity for the Scottish Government to unveil a radical programme for government—an opportunity to use the powers of this Parliament to transform our country and to send a message to the Scottish people that this Parliament's priority is to heal the divides in our country, be they social, economic or political. It was an opportunity to recognise and act on the huge inequalities in our society, not just in life chances but in life expectancy. Instead, we have a Government that continues to grandstand on grievance and which is more focused on old debates, repeated arguments and its own obsessions, while applying the sticking-plaster approach to our most treasured public service, the NHS.

It is clear that that is not enough on health. Today, we got less than 30 seconds in the First Minister's statement on our NHS. That is not enough for overworked, undervalued and underresourced NHS staff, and not enough for

patients and families across the country. Instead, we got only bland words and talk of a plan. The SNP has been in complete charge of Scotland's NHS for almost 10 years. The NHS in Scotland is independent—the Scottish Government sets its budgets, defines its priorities and oversees its delivery.

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

Anas Sarwar: I will not.

After nearly 10 years in charge, the SNP cannot escape responsibility. Its plans are failing. We have the biggest crisis in the history of the NHS in nursing, with more than 2,200 vacancies, over 300 of which are for mental health nurses. There has been a 600 per cent increase in private agency nursing spend, which is now almost £24 million a year. In the health secretary's own area, there has been a 1,000 per cent increase in that spend—money that would be better spent on recruiting and supporting NHS nurses. The First Minister cannot escape responsibility either, because when she was the health secretary, she cut training places for nurses and midwives.

We have also had a decade of mismanagement of primary care that sees us in the middle of a GP crisis in which one in four practices is reporting a vacancy, one in four GP training places is unfilled this year, GP practices are closing and hundreds of GPs are taking early retirement—more than 270 in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde area alone. All of that is the consequence of the SNP cutting £1 billion from primary care budgets.

The First Minister and the health secretary need to listen to what our dedicated NHS staff are saying, because only a third of them believe that there are enough of them to do their jobs properly and barely 13 per cent of nurses think that our health service can cope.

What about the Government's record on the expected standards of patient care? Of the Government's 19 expected standards for the NHS, we are failing on 13 of them, including on early detection of cancer, treatment waiting times, accident and emergency, and child and adolescent mental health.

The Government's response on failing to meet those standards is not to up its game but instead to attempt to scrap the standards altogether, with political cover from the Tories. The SNP has campaigned in elections and referendums against the privatisation of our NHS, but at the same time it spends more and more taxpayer cash on private health firms. That money could go to front-line services: to doctors, nurses and hospitals.

In the past year alone, almost 40,000 patients were sent for care in private hospitals at a cost of

more than £50 million. Patients are forced to travel long distances to be treated privately rather than being seen by their local NHS. More than 2,000 patients have been forced to travel from Grampian to Ross Hall hospital in Glasgow. That is all okay, however, because our Government pretends that there are no problems.

Last week, we published freedom of information responses from health boards across Scotland that showed that boards expect an NHS cuts bombshell of at least £1 billion over the next four years. That will have a direct effect on patient care and pile more pressure on our NHS staff. However, the health secretary's response was to say that there are

"no cuts planned"

and that

"to suggest otherwise is simply false".

The health secretary should listen to the residents of the east end of Glasgow who are campaigning against the proposed closure of Lightburn hospital; to the expectant mothers in the west of Scotland who are campaigning against maternity closures at the Vale of Leven and Inverclyde hospitals; and to the parents in Paisley who have relaunched their campaign to protect paediatric services at the Royal Alexandra hospital. She should respond to the tens—if not hundreds—of emails that she has received from patients at the centre for integrative care at Gartnavel who face the closure of their in-patient services. Instead of listening, however, the health secretary chooses to insult their intelligence.

I urge the Government to use the powers of this Parliament to transform Scotland, and to please recognise that there is another way—a better way—forward. We can probably use the powers of the Parliament to increase resources to our vital public services. We can have bold action on the NHS, social care and organ donation, and on the workforce planning crisis that we face in our NHS. Let us forget our obsessions and focus on what the Government is meant to be doing every day: helping the most underprivileged people in our communities and delivering an NHS of which we can all be proud.

15:57

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the First Minister for setting out the Scottish Government's programme for government. I do not know whether the policy area that I am going to speak about got 10, 30 or 40 seconds in the First Minister's statement, but I have six minutes in which to speak about the issues.

Anas Sarwar spoke about obsession. It seems to be an obsession of the Labour Party to

constantly oppose everything, which is why the party will continue to be in opposition.

I will focus my contribution on the proposed social security bill, which—as the First Minister said—will enable us to take the first step towards a social security system that is based on respect and dignity. As convener of the Social Security Committee, I look forward to working with members, interested parties and the Scottish Government. We need to ensure that the bill delivers, with dignity and respect at its heart.

Tory welfare cuts have caused the most vulnerable in our society untold misery. I say to Ruth Davidson—although she is not in the chamber just now—and to the Tories on her side of the chamber that sanctioning disabled people is neither dignified nor respectful; it is absolutely disgraceful and despicable. The Tories should not speak about welfare and disabled people, given the way in which they treat folk in the welfare system.

We need to take a different approach with the powers that have been transferred to this Parliament, although I remind Parliament that only 15 per cent—or £2.7 billion out of a total of £17.5 billion—is being devolved. We need to make people aware of that, and we need to be realistic with ourselves and with the general public. The changes will not happen overnight, and I and other members of the Social Security Committee realise that there is a lot of work to be done. We should be telling people that change will not happen overnight and that they should not expect that to happen.

The social security bill will be a huge bill—it will be legislation on a scale that the Scottish Parliament has not seen before. We must ensure that people are aware of its size—and that we get it right.

The Scottish Government has received powers over 11 existing disability and caring benefits, including disability living allowance, personal independence payments and the carer's allowance, and control over funeral payments, sure start maternity grants and cold weather and winter fuel payments. The Government will also have the power to top up benefits, create new benefits and be flexible in the way in which universal credit is paid by the Department for Work and Pensions. We need to look at how those benefits will be delivered.

For example, the use of private companies to carry out assessments has been an expensive failure. Atos has had its work capability assessment contract withdrawn because of its abysmal performance, which resulted in huge delays and claimants being found fit for work who were clearly not fit for work. Those included many

claimants who have a chaotic lifestyle because of mental health problems, as Willie Rennie mentioned. Atos and other private companies must be looked at because they are not up to the mark on the delivery of benefits. PIP claimants had to wait months because of the failure of Capita and Atos to deliver medical assessments. Do we think that that is fit for people in modern-day Scotland?

When the new social security agency is up and running, it must serve people with dignity. I have been out and about in my constituency—as I am sure other members have been in their constituencies—and have spoken to the people who deliver services. I have been to Jobcentre Plus and welfare rights offices as well as Flourish house and other places to get first-hand experience of what people have to suffer. People who have mental health problems might have to present themselves for an assessment at a time when they are feeling better. The people who examine them tell them that they are fine, so their benefits are cut completely. Those people go straight back to the way that they were before. Some people have chronic illnesses that cannot be cured. Why should they have to go every other week to be looked at by a so-called medical expert, Atos or Capita?

I am sure that all members have faced a similar situation to this one. A gentleman came to see me because on 31 December he was sent to Edinburgh to go through an assessment although he lives in the west end of Glasgow. We need to look at where it is best for people to go.

We are talking about real people with real needs, and we need to make sure that they are treated as such. It is our job to ensure that they are treated properly, and I look forward to the committee working on the social security bill.

16:03

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): Today marks an important moment in the United Kingdom's battle to eradicate poverty, not because of anything that the First Minister said this afternoon, but because of the publication by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation of its strategy to solve UK poverty. I can see that a number of members in the chamber are reading it at the moment.

On reading the strategy document this morning, I was struck by how much of it accords with what Conservatives have been saying for years.

"For those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty".

That sounds like it was lifted from a Tory manifesto, but those are the JRF's words.

"Work should always pay and people should be supported into employment".

Again, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, like the Conservatives, recognises that solving poverty cannot be done by Governments alone but will be achieved only when Governments work with, rather than against, business and voluntary organisations.

In her statement, the First Minister talked about child poverty, and we know that the Scottish Government launched a consultation on a child poverty bill in August. I am sure that everyone in the chamber would want to support the aspirations behind the forthcoming child poverty bill, but the idea that child poverty can be eradicated by legislating it away with the sweep of a draftsman's pen shows just how impoverished is the Government's thinking on child poverty. There is no target duty, no matter how well crafted, that will lift even a single child out of poverty in Scotland. I note that we on the Conservative benches are in agreement with Patrick Harvie on that, so we must be right.

Eradicating child poverty is an ambitious and important aspiration for any Government. It is not only an economic imperative but a moral duty. However, we will not achieve it unless we are prepared to confront not only the symptoms and effects of poverty but its underlying causes.

What are those causes? There is no mystery about that—they have been set out over and over again by think tanks such as the Centre for Social Justice. Among the principal causes of poverty are addiction, worklessness, family breakdown and educational underattainment. What does the SNP's programme for government have to say about those causes?

John Mason: Will the member take an intervention?

Adam Tomkins: Not at the moment.

What does last month's consultation paper say about them? Precious little. We have already heard about how skills shortages have been made worse, not improved, by the SNP cutting 152,000 college places, and about how fewer, not more, of our poorer students manage to get to university in Scotland.

The SNP's record on addiction is every bit as poor. Drug and alcohol funding was cut by £15 million this year; funding for drugs recovery was cut by 11 per cent; and local addiction projects report that their funding has been cut by up to 20 per cent.

That brings me back to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which said in its document today that

"Additional spending on benefits without addressing the root causes"

of poverty

"has failed to reduce poverty."

That is a finding that we would do well to bear in mind as we scrutinise the forthcoming social security bill.

All over the world, countries are realising that it is cities that are the economic powerhouses of wealth generation, job creation and growth. From Cleveland and Toronto to Melbourne, Atlanta and the Rhine-Ruhr, policymakers in the US, Canada, Australia and Germany are empowering their cities and devolving powers to mayors, triggering what Bruce Katz has called a "metropolitan revolution".

Closer to home, that is what the northern powerhouse, the city deal programme and city region devolution are all about: joining cities up with their regional economies to improve transport, transform local infrastructure and create jobs—but not in Scotland. There are no mayors here, and the First Minister did not even mention the word "cities" in her statement.

Whereas in Manchester, for example, devolution is extending beyond transport and infrastructure to health and social care, in Scotland those areas remain resolutely centralised. Devolution has become a one-way street. Powers are transferred from Westminster to Holyrood but, once here, they are hoarded centrally and not passed down to our cities and city regions. Yet, as the Scottish cities alliance argued in June of this year,

"We can only achieve the economic potential for our places and people if we have the levers and the collaborative working arrangements that would allow us to compete with other cities close to home and globally."

In Scotland, we have grown used to leading Britain's constitutional arguments about devolution but now we are being dragged back. The Scottish economy is being outperformed by the rest of the UK in terms of growth per capita. Productivity, too, is lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Even recent good news—the 51 per cent increase in foreign direct investment in 2015, for example—is dwarfed by the 127 per cent increase in foreign direct investment seen in the north-west and north-east of England.

If Glasgow, the city that I represent, is to emulate Manchester's economic resurgence, the Scottish Government needs to act. Glasgow enjoys a labour pool of just over 400,000 people, but more than 1.2 million working-age people live within a 45-minute commute of the city. With a third of Scotland's economy, a third of Scotland's jobs and nearly 30 per cent of Scotland's businesses, it is essential both for the city and its region that the two are closely and effectively bound together.

In England and Wales, legislative provision was made in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 for combined authorities and city region mayors. Although governance structures on their own will not deliver the regeneration, growth and productivity that Scotland's urban economies need, international evidence strongly suggests that cities and city regions will not thrive without them. I referred earlier to Bruce Katz's "metropolitan revolution", which combines new governance structures with new powers to create better outcomes.

The First Minister opened her statement with a reference to this Parliament's new powers. She also mentioned the devolution from local authorities to communities. However, the missing link—as ever with the SNP—is the transfer of power from Holyrood to the councils and, in particular, the cities of this country.

The First Minister has said that in this Parliament, there will be "a real battle of ideas". She is right about that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can you please wind up?

Adam Tomkins: I am winding up, Presiding Officer.

What defines that battle is a centralised, top-down, nanny-knows-best approach versus our commitment to decentralisation, devolution and localism.

16:10

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I welcome the programme for government that the First Minister has announced. Before I carry on, I want to pick up on a couple of points that Ruth Davidson made earlier. She spoke about "talking shops" and "commissions", but surely dialogue with and consultation of the electorate and population of Scotland are good things—or are the Conservatives saying that they do not want to have dialogue with and consultation of the electorate?

Ruth Davidson also said that the proposed legislation "fails to hang together". However, we will have a budget bill, an APD bill that will certainly help tourism, a housing bill that will help housing associations to borrow money to build more housing, a child poverty bill that aims to take children out of poverty, and a social security bill that aims to provide a decent social security system. Surely those will all tie together to help the economy. In addition, there is the £100 million investment that the First Minister spoke about, the 50,000 affordable homes target for the current session of Parliament and the £500 million Scottish growth scheme. Surely those things will

tie in and "hang together". Maybe Ruth Davidson just was not listening to what the First Minister had to say.

The programme for government is packed full of ideas, bills and actions to take Scotland forward, despite the backdrop of Brexit. As usual, we have heard negative commentary from Opposition members about what is not in the programme, but no one could deny that there is something for everyone in it. There are social policies aplenty and policies to stimulate the economy, and those will go hand in hand to take Scotland forward to being a more socially just and competitive nation.

I welcome the announcement of a new housing bill and the commitment to build 50,000 new affordable homes, which includes 35,000 homes for social rent. Everyone in Scotland has the right to expect a safe, warm and affordable home; delivering on that commitment will help the Scottish Government to achieve just that. Like many other MSPs, throughout the summer I visited a range of organisations. Only yesterday, I had a meeting with one of my local housing associations. One of its key messages was that we should keep the house building programme because it assists with a range of aspects of society including employment, training and health—although we should not forget that it also means that people live in better homes.

The SNP in government has a strong track record on housing, having exceeded the target to build 30,000 new affordable homes over the previous session of Parliament and having restarted the construction of council housing with 5,000 new council houses. That is in sharp contrast with the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, which are in the ludicrous position of having built only six new council houses throughout their last term in office, and with a Tory party that is obsessed with austerity and is taking real investment out of the economy. Building at least 50,000 homes will provide further support to first-time buyers and support the economy, and it will form an essential part of the plans to keep Scotland moving forward.

My constituency of Greenock and Inverclyde has in the past benefited from Scottish Government commitments on housing; I am certain that local housing associations will benefit further. I know that they continually look and plan for new-build projects.

Sandra White spoke about the social security bill. I have encouraged constituents and organisations to take part in the consultation that was launched a few weeks ago, and I spoke about that at an event during carers week. The Scottish Government has already confirmed that it will use its new powers to increase carers allowance to the same rate as jobseekers allowance, to abolish the

bedroom tax and to scrap the 84-day rule, which removes income from the families of disabled children. The Scottish Government is determined to put dignity and respect at the heart of social security, instead of the Dickensian approach from London.

I am sure that all parties in the chamber will want to ensure that the limited powers that are coming to Scotland are well managed and are used in a way that is cost-effective and tackles inequality.

Despite Scottish Government requests for the roll-out of universal credit to be halted until the process of delivering new powers to the Scottish Parliament is complete, the UK Government has gone ahead with gradually rolling out universal credit across the UK. According to Citizens Advice Scotland, people on universal credit are far more likely to be in rent arrears. The five-week waiting period before people receive their first payment means that some are in arrears from the start.

Universal credit will roll out in my constituency in November this year. Over the past year, I have engaged with many organisations on it. In the summer, I heard from the local health and social care partnership, the DWP and housing associations. I have also heard from numerous constituents who are concerned about the roll-out of universal credit and how it will affect them.

I am thankful that the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that, as we implement our new powers and start to make changes, people will continue to have a say in the debates and decisions that affect them—which is unlike what the Conservatives want. The poorest people in society—including the working poor—have paid the price for the Tory obsession with austerity for far too long.

One of the measures that the First Minister announced this afternoon was £100 million for investment. I welcome her announcement that some of that money will be spent at the Inverclyde royal hospital in Greenock and the Glasgow royal infirmary. The IRH is built at the top of a hill that is exposed to the inclement weather that we regularly have in Inverclyde. There is absolutely no shelter, so the hospital takes a battering all year round. There is a backlog of repairs to the building that are required, so any investment in it will be greatly appreciated throughout the district. I also welcome the pilot of a minor ailments service that will take place through the community pharmacies in Inverclyde.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Will you wind up, please?

Stuart McMillan: Certainly, Presiding Officer.

The programme shows that the Scottish Government is getting on with the day-to-day business of running the country. I welcome it. It is good for Scotland and for Greenock and Inverclyde.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are very tight for time, so I will have to be very strict with members from now on. Some members' contributions have had to be cut because members took far too long earlier on.

16:16

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister is right to open the programme for government by highlighting that this is a new Parliament with new powers but that we are in challenging and uncertain times. When Parliament first started, we raised 10 per cent of our income, then it was 12 per cent. Now it is 52 per cent. That changes the landscape dramatically and brings into much sharper focus our responsibilities for helping the economy to grow.

The picture in our economy is mixed. In one quarter employment levels increase, but in the next quarter they drop. Unemployment levels continue to be stubborn. The Fraser of Allander institute, PricewaterhouseCoopers and many other economists have revised their growth expectations downwards. Across a range of measures, from productivity to inward investment, we lag behind the rest of the UK. We need to reverse that.

Levels of business confidence are troubling: a range of recent surveys show that business confidence has dipped. The Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Fraser of Allander institute and others are all saying that business optimism is substantially down.

Without doubt, the challenge is considerable. We came within a hair's breadth of recession last year. When we add Brexit to the mix, there is no wonder that there is real concern about the consequences for our economy. In a post-Brexit Scotland, we will require action to match the rhetoric: the politics of assertion need to be over.

I will start with "Scotland's Economic Strategy", which was launched 18 months ago by John Swinney. At the time, I said that it was breathtakingly ambitious—after all, we were going to grow at a faster rate even than China. However, there was little evidence about how we would get there—a fact that Audit Scotland highlighted in its report at the start of summer. There is no action plan and no measuring framework; we have no idea whether the strategy is working well, or whether it is working at all. I am renowned for my patience with the Scottish Government, but 18 months on it is not good enough that we are still

waiting. We are faced with a review of the institutional architecture that is lacking in focus and is, to be frank, a distraction from the urgent work on the economy and Brexit. However, the cabinet secretary's response was a less than thoughtful "Let's bash on."

Today, we had a flurry of announcements—to which I will turn—but they come against a backdrop of cuts to funding for enterprise. I am not sure that we are doing enough, if we are serious about the economy and mitigating the consequences of Brexit. The truth is that I could not see a lot in the economy section of the First Minister's speech that was new, but I am happy to be corrected. Her announcement of £100 million in response to Brexit is welcome, but it is a drop in the ocean and it is not new money but underspend from last year.

How much of the infrastructure investment that she spoke about today is being accelerated? Is there any reprofiled capital investment? Is any new money from borrowing on the table? We all agree that capital stimulus can and does help the economy, but I remain to be convinced that the scale of the response from the Scottish Government will be sufficient to achieve the effect that we all desire.

I very much welcome the First Minister's announcement on the new national manufacturing institute. However, I am sure that she will forgive me for pointing out that she first announced that in February—although, at that time, it was called "the centre of excellence for manufacturing and skills academy". We do not need recycled policies and announcements; we need this Government to rise to the challenge that is Brexit.

That brings me to the Scottish growth scheme. I am glad that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution is back in the chamber, because this issue is interesting. Scottish Labour introduced a Brexit action plan some weeks before the Scottish Government responded to the economic challenge. We called for accelerated capital investment, for the continued protection of workers and for a Brexit support fund. I genuinely hope that the Scottish growth scheme is achievable, because it will inject money into business where it is most important to do so. We support positive action to help businesses in these uncertain times. However, businesses need certainty, and it would be unhelpful if the proposal has been brought forward without dialogue with the Treasury and simply becomes another area of grievance. Businesses deserve more than that. I look forward to further detail being shared with Parliament.

On jobs and fair work, we need to build on the efforts of the fair work convention and get beyond warm words. It would be helpful to know exactly

what is proposed by the Scottish Government. I welcome the revised target for the Scottish business pledge, but I encourage the Scottish Government to be more ambitious, as currently only 250 businesses have signed up to the pledge, against potentially more than 350,000 businesses in Scotland.

On energy, I welcome the decommissioning action plan, the new energy strategy and the warm homes bill. It is a matter of record that I have said many times in the past that it is a national scandal that we have 900,000 households in fuel poverty. The new minister admitted what we all knew, which is that the target of ending fuel poverty would not be reached, but it is imperative that we focus on that, so that people do not have to choose between heating and eating.

16:22

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I find myself not referring to the speech that I intended to give this afternoon. Instead, I will reflect on my upbringing and the challenges that affected my community.

I grew up in Motherwell and Wishaw, which is the area that I now represent. When I was a teenager, I saw the miners' strike, I saw the miners pitted against the steelworkers by the policies of the Tory Government and I saw the closure of Ravenscraig, which ended up causing the area of Gowkthrapple in my constituency to have the highest male unemployment rate in Europe, and poverty that was previously unknown in the area. Most of the workers in the area were employed in Ravenscraig, and there was a thriving community with businesses, but the latest figures show that it is still one of the poorest areas in Scotland. I have to say to Mr Tomkins that it was not addictions or worklessness that caused that poverty, but the deindustrialisation that was forced on our communities by the Tory Government, which left communities with no future.

The Government then had no plans for those communities and demonstrated a recklessness that is equalled only by what his Government in Westminster has done in relation to Brexit, where there is also no planning. Governments cannot make decisions about communities that leave them with no plans and expect things to work out right. That was reckless, and we are again seeing recklessness from the present Tory Government.

The Scottish Government introduced the Scottish welfare fund as a safety net for people in poverty that would mitigate the bedroom tax and provide crisis grants for those who were sanctioned by the DWP, under Tory policies. The rate of appeals under that sanction system is nearly 50 per cent. It is unfair and broken, so the

Scottish Government has introduced £24 million to mitigate the problems. I do not think that we will take any lessons on child poverty from the Tories, this afternoon.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and I welcome the First Minister's commitment that the programme will drive sustainable growth, reform education and create opportunities for all. It will transform our public services and empower local communities by getting on with the business of government and delivering for Scotland.

I am about to make a public statement that I have never made before: I am an addict of "The Archers". I say this not to diminish in any way the domestic abuse problems that exist, but to highlight that the story in "The Archers" at the moment comes close to the very problems that the domestic abuse bill that will be introduced seeks to solve. The programme has raised public awareness about the issues in a way that we, as politicians, might struggle to do. Some of my fellow "Archers" addicts raised more than £130,000 for the domestic abuse charity Refuge.

We have come so far in how we deal with domestic abuse. Every single incident is to be deplored, but it is still an invisible crime in our communities. The new domestic abuse bill will follow on significantly from the work that has already been undertaken by this Government and Police Scotland, and which has transformed the way in which society approaches and reacts to domestic abuse. The formation of the domestic abuse task force and the establishment of the national group to address violence against women have been transformational. Significantly, the equally safe campaign has given some comfort to victims of domestic abuse by tackling the issue at the height of the problems over the Christmas period. Our approach now is robust and effective, and we are learning all the time, but the domestic abuse bill will enhance that work and will prosecute people for psychological and controlling abuse.

Also in justice, I commend the Government for the proposed third party rights bill. Again, we see a Government that is transforming our justice system—it is modernising it and bringing it up to international benchmarks in third party rights. The bill will give flexibility for the introduction of a third party into a contract, and will provide that party with some rights. For example, should it so wish, a construction company or a property developer can extend rights to the potential purchaser of a property. That is a good way forward that will make things clearer for people who are involved in any transactions in relation to such contracts. It will modernise our legal system, so I welcome that move by the Scottish Government.

The growth scheme will be of huge importance to small and medium-sized enterprises, which are very worried about the implications of Brexit, and the possible loss of horizon 2020 funding and the uncertainty that that has brought. However, the growth fund, which will provide £5 million to eligible businesses, will be transformational and will ensure that our SMEs can go forward with confidence at a time when little clarity is coming from any level of government in the UK, other than from the Scottish Government, which has thought through and planned for the implications of Brexit.

16:28

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the Government's programme and do so in the shortened time allotted to me. I would like to outline some of the concerns that we have about health and say where we think that the priorities should be so that we can all see a healthier Scotland.

I have some initial observations on what the First Minister said this afternoon. Many of the points that she made were the same as points that she made in May and were in the SNP manifesto. I hope that the Government will go beyond those proposals and show more vision and ambition in policy terms. That is especially true in the context of the major challenges facing the NHS, not just in the next five years but way beyond that. People are living longer and increasing demands are being placed on the NHS at various stages. It is critical that the health service receives the necessary funding in order to ensure that it can continue to provide a high-quality service, free at the point of use, for the people of Scotland. Similarly, it is vital that the number of people employed on the front line of the NHS can cope with the ever-increasing demand.

On the funding commitments that were mentioned, Audit Scotland noted that in order to guarantee that health and social care services can meet current demand, the Scottish Government will need to invest between £422 million and £625 million every year. The SNP pledged in its manifesto and the First Minister pledged at the start of this parliamentary session and again today an additional £500 million for the NHS over this session. Although that funding commitment is welcome, it is long overdue, given the chronic underfunding of the NHS that we witnessed during the previous session in comparison to the higher level of NHS funding in England.

In light of the funding commitments, it is imperative that the Scottish Government acts quickly to channel funds into those areas of the NHS that are in urgent need of investment. One of the Scottish Conservatives' principal areas of

concern is the staffing and workforce of the NHS at all levels and across all disciplines, which I do not shirk from describing as being in crisis.

The Government and the First Minister keep saying that there are record numbers of employees. I make two comments on that: record numbers do not mean sufficient numbers, and record numbers of people are getting old in Scotland. It is no answer to say that there are record numbers of staff.

Ensuring that the NHS has adequate front-line staffing is vital so that patients can be attended to as quickly as possible and receive the best treatment. Various major professional bodies have expressed concern at the existing levels of staffing numbers in their respective fields and have done so again this very day. I will not go over the statistics relating to GPs, as they are well known. We know that GPs are retiring earlier, their workloads are increasing and, as the GP workforce ages, younger doctors are not being attracted to the profession. Only yesterday, it was reported that one in every four GP training slots in Scotland is lying vacant. There are problems at both the entry to and exit from the profession.

The SNP has been in power for almost a decade, yet it is not prepared for this crisis in staffing. I say to Clare Adamson that we will not take lessons from the SNP on recklessness when the SNP has left general practice on its knees. Our family doctors are on the front line, but—unbelievably—the percentage of NHS funding that reaches general practice has been going down. As Ruth Davidson said, last week the Scottish Conservatives announced our plans to commit at least 10 per cent of the total NHS budget to general practice by 2020. That would represent a significant increase from the current 8 per cent of total spending. The Scottish Government has known about that, not least because the Royal College of General Practitioners, when it welcomed our commitment last week, said that it had been calling for that for almost three years.

I turn to another body of health professionals. The Royal College of Nursing has indicated that “proper funding” will need to be in place to ensure that regional health boards are able to employ enough staff to maintain safe staffing levels. Today, the RCN said:

“the increase in staff is not keeping pace with demand: the vacancy rate at June 2016 was 4.2%, an increase from 3.7% over the year and, even more worrying, almost 600 posts had been vacant for three months or more”.

This very afternoon, the BMA noted its concern at the increase in the over-six-months vacancy rate. It made a basic but obvious point: it is not enough to create additional consultant posts; they need to be filled.

Those are just two examples from different sectors in the NHS, but there is a clear theme of a severe staffing crisis that has existed for too long in our NHS.

The next few years will be critical for the NHS in Scotland. Our health service faces clear challenges and it is up to the Scottish Government to heed the calls made by the various bodies that represent health staff across Scotland, target funding more carefully and ensure adequate provision of staff across all sections of the NHS.

16:33

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): We live in challenging times. The First Minister has demonstrated again today that her Government is determined to lead with principle and purpose, focused on using the powers of this Parliament to take our country forward and make a meaningful difference at every opportunity.

The issues that we face as a nation are significant, and of course we all understand that. How do we best advance and compete as part of an international economy that is fragile, imbalanced and still recovering from the financial crisis of 2008?

How does Scotland continue to resist and mitigate an on-going, ideological, unnecessary Conservative Westminster austerity agenda? That imposed agenda has hampered growth and sustainable development and created needless anguish and strain for many of the most vulnerable in our society.

How do we best continue to tackle climate change, uphold our human rights, build a fairer country and make Scotland an even more internationalist and outward-looking place?

How do we take our country forward in the uncertain separatist scenario that the Brexit vote and the Tory UK Government have landed Scotland in against our will?

The SNP Scottish Government was re-elected on a record of delivery and a realistic but ambitious platform for change that will meaningfully and purposefully take our country forward despite the challenging financial and constitutional circumstances in which we find ourselves, which I have articulated.

The programme for government that we have been debating reflects the high aspirations, strong legacy of competence and authentic social democratic values of the modern SNP. It reflects a manifesto that was supported when the people of Scotland cast their votes on 5 May. Like our country, that manifesto was multidimensional. The

Scottish Government programme reflects the breadth and range of our nation's challenges.

I will focus on two interconnected elements: equality and fairness, and prosperity. In view of the political make-up of the Parliament, most of our constituents believe in creating a fairer Scotland, and we should always remember that. That is why I strongly support the Scottish Government's programme to use the new powers that are coming to the Parliament to advance social justice and promote greater equality.

For example, the proposed child poverty bill will step up efforts to eradicate child poverty, and the best start grant and the baby box will make a meaningful difference. The proposed gender balance on public boards bill will enhance equality, promote representation and recognition, and help to encourage similar reform across our society and throughout our economy.

It is important that the proposed social security bill will allow the 15 per cent of devolved social security spending to be allocated to the Parliament and will enable it to use the power to allocate that spending to those in need, with greater dignity and respect. We will soon see the end of the remarkably indecent and ill-judged Tory bedroom tax.

As well as creating a fairer country, we must all work to create a more prosperous Scotland with a dynamic, sustainable and inclusive economy that is focused around fair work to deliver greater opportunities and generate wealth for public services. That is why I endorse the Scottish Government's plans to support Scotland's economy, especially in the Brexit environment. For example, an air passenger duty bill will help to connect Scotland to more of the world and more of the world to Scotland. With greater connectivity combined with a new Scottish growth scheme of £0.5 billion of investment guarantees, the Scottish Government's determination to develop export growth, support SMEs and strengthen links with established networks will, as well as opening up emerging markets, support productivity and encourage investment.

It is clear that, by proposing those measures and more, the Scottish Government is taking robust action to strengthen the Scottish economy and make it more dynamic and inclusive in these challenging times.

I could say a lot more, but my time is up and I know that we are tight for time.

16:39

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): There is no doubt that there are major challenges and pressures in communities across Scotland.

We all know that. However, in considering the First Minister's speech, I want to focus on the positives on which we can work together. There are a lot of positives in the programme for government on which we should be able to work together and bring about improvement across Scotland.

We welcome the social security bill. We will work with the minister and the Government, and we would certainly want to put dignity and respect at the heart of that bill. However, I should be clear that every person in Scotland deserves pity and respect. This morning I was on a picket line in Dunfermline, in Fife, with Unison members that work in Fife College. They clearly believe that they are being denied dignity, respect and fair pay. It is important that, if we are going to make claims about dignity and respect, we ensure that we deliver it for everyone.

A housing bill will be introduced. Our manifesto proposed to build more houses. We can—and need to—work together to build houses. Yesterday, Shelter Scotland launched a homelessness and rough sleeping campaign called far from fixed. It is estimated that more than 5,000 people sleep rough each year; 30,000 households were assessed as homeless; an unknown number are sofa surfing, as it is being described; 10,000 households live in temporary accommodation; and 5,000 children wake up every morning without a home to call their own. Housing is a massive priority because of that.

My issue with the Government is not its commitment to 35,000 social rented houses and 50,000 affordable houses, but with how its commitment will be delivered. Just as the Government has said that it will introduce a detailed delivery plan on its commitment to superfast broadband, we need to have a detailed delivery plan that sets out how we intend to build those houses. The benefits of doing so are clear, given the numbers of people who are homeless and on council waiting lists.

Alex Neil mentioned skill shortages, apprenticeships and the jobs that can be created. If members take Fife Council as an example, it had a programme to build 2,700 houses over the past five years, which it has managed to deliver—yes, with the support of the Scottish Government, but also with the support of tenants in raising the money. The number of apprenticeships and jobs that have been created locally is impressive.

We also welcome the child poverty bill. Again, we will want to work with the Government on that. However, we are clear that we need an anti-poverty strategy across all levels of Government. Today, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published its report "We can solve poverty in the UK: a strategy for governments, businesses,

communities and citizens". We need to develop that strategy in Scotland and solve poverty here.

The report makes it clear that, in order to tackle poverty, all levels of government need to be engaged. The Scottish Government needs to be joined up in this place, because the topic runs across every Government portfolio. We need to involve local government, so that that is joined up; we need to involve the dynamic third sector; we need to involve business and industry. That clearly comes across in today's report.

In welcoming the child poverty bill, I hope that we can pick up on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's work, which has more of a focus on England and Wales, and that we can develop a coherent anti-poverty strategy that will allow us not just to talk about dealing with poverty, but to deal with poverty.

The Scottish union learning fund is mentioned in the programme for government. That is very welcome. The key to the fund is for learners to be able to progress. The cuts on part-time education and the gaps in workers' skills in particular are a major block.

In my final minute, I will focus briefly on local government. We know that local government has had a really tough settlement these past years. We can see the cuts biting in every community—in services, support and local organisations. The proposal to put £100 million from local government into schools is a good one.

Labour also said that we would raise money: we would put taxes up and invest in public services that way. However, the Government says that rather than put taxes up it will dip into local taxation and start spending that money on its national priorities. As good as those national priorities are, such an approach is an affront to local democracy and to local revenue raising. It is not the way to build strong relationships with local government. As other members have said, decentralisation and the devolution of power are about not just taking powers in Edinburgh but taking powers further down—we really need to stop taking power up the way.

I hope that we can work together on the many bills in the programme that I think can make Scotland a better place. I look forward to working with the appropriate ministers.

16:45

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The first debate on the programme for government in a new parliamentary session is always important.

I did not hear much optimism from Willie Rennie. I confess that all his talk about smoking was putting me at severe risk of relapsing.

Many members who spoke this afternoon commented on the new powers that the Parliament has in this new session. We are dealing with a new political context. The new powers were expected, of course, and we are well prepared for them. The EU referendum result, however, was not predicted by many people in this Parliament and presents us with many challenges. The Government remains resolute that, as well as taking the opportunities that are afforded by the new powers, it will see Scotland through the challenges that we will face as a result of Brexit, whatever that means and whenever it happens.

The Government will also see Scotland through the challenges that are posed by the financial situation. It is a fact that our budget up to 2019-20 will reduce by 3 per cent and that over the decade from 2010 to 2020 £3.3 billion will have been taken out of the Scottish Government's budget. Clare Adamson's anger was palpable when she made her powerful speech about the impact on poverty, equality and the economy in the times that we are living in. Such anger is apposite.

The focus of my portfolio is social security, communities and equalities. That creates the space for us to think differently about how we use the new powers to make lasting progress in Scotland and about how we can pull together on anti-poverty measures across every Government portfolio, working closely with the third sector and our partners in local government.

We are determined to use our new powers to build a social security system that is founded on the principles of dignity and respect. A consultation is under way on the proposed social security bill and our wider policy objectives and I urge as many people as possible, particularly those with lived experience of the benefits system, to take part. I encourage MSP colleagues of all parties to facilitate such participation.

The new powers, particularly on social security, represent the biggest programme of change in the history of devolution. We want to use them to make a difference. We want to—and we will—make different decisions and choices. However, we must recognise the hard reality: with powers that relate to 15 per cent of the welfare state we will not address the unfairness of the 85 per cent that remains reserved.

It is ironic that Conservatives say that we should address the causes of poverty, when every year we spend £100 million on mitigating the consequences of welfare reform and UK Government-imposed poverty. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves running to stand still.

We have to face the harsh reality: some £2 billion was taken out of our economy in 2015-16 alone as a result of welfare cuts.

It is also ironic that the Conservatives—the political party that scrapped the statutory income targets that were designed to tackle child poverty, probably because it was not going to meet them—are quoting the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The Conservatives should ask the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group what those organisations think of the UK Government's scrapping of statutory income targets to address child poverty. It is not possible to have a plan to tackle child poverty that pays no heed to the family income that supports children.

We will introduce our own child poverty bill in the new year. As the First Minister said, that will—arguably—be the most important piece of legislation that we introduce in this parliamentary year. In Scotland, 210,000 children live in poverty. Despite the limitations on our resources and our powers, we are determined to eradicate the obscenity of child poverty in modern-day Scotland.

We are also determined to tackle fuel poverty. Backed by more than £500 million of funding, Scotland's energy efficiency programme will make a huge difference to ensuring that people's homes are warmer. It will improve people's health, help to tackle climate change and support 4,000 jobs per annum.

I say to Alex Rowley that we have a strategy to tackle homelessness and to create more affordable homes, which is our more homes Scotland approach. The approach is about more investment for more houses. Over the parliamentary session, £3 billion will be invested to secure at least 50,000 affordable homes. The approach also focuses on the housing infrastructure fund, on planning and on the skills and expertise that Alex Neil spoke about.

It was ironic that some Opposition members spent more time talking about independence than the First Minister did. The First Minister and SNP members talked about the child poverty bill, the social security bill, the gender balance bill, the domestic abuse bill, the housing bill and the time-bar bill.

This is a new Parliament with new powers in a new political context. We have still to understand the full and crushing impact of Brexit. If our interests cannot be protected in a UK context, surely independence is an option that people have the right to consider. No politician, whether they are a yes, a no or a maybe, has the right to stand in the way of the ability of the people of Scotland to choose their future.

The programme for government is a plan to put power back into the control of the people of

Scotland. It is based on the Government's belief that our strength and unity as a nation depend on every person being able to play their full part without unfair barriers being placed on their ambitions. This is a plan for Scotland's prosperity and we ask all of Scotland and Parliament to get behind it.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The programme for government debate will continue tomorrow. I remind members who have spoken to be in the chamber for the closing speeches tomorrow.

Junior Minister

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-01254, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the appointment of a junior Scottish minister.

16:53

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am pleased to seek Parliament's approval of the appointment of Michael Russell as the Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe.

Earlier this afternoon, I set out our programme for government, which shows our clear commitment to delivering on the manifesto commitments that we were elected on. However, we must acknowledge—as I did earlier—that we are in a very different context from the one that we expected in May.

On 23 June, the people of Scotland cast a clear and decisive vote to remain in the European Union, and the Government is committed to protecting Scotland's interests. As part of our response to the vote, Parliament mandated the Scottish Government to hold discussions with the United Kingdom Government, devolved Administrations, EU institutions and member states on protecting Scotland's interests and our relationship with Europe.

Tomorrow, I will provide a full update to Parliament on recent developments and the work that the Government is undertaking. However, Parliament is already aware that we have a commitment from the Prime Minister that the Scottish Government should be involved in the development of the UK Government's position ahead of article 50 being triggered and beyond and that options to protect our relationship with Europe will form part of those discussions. We intend to see that commitment honoured.

Of course, there is still a woeful lack of detail from the UK Government on what Brexit will actually mean. Whenever somebody comes out with any semblance of detail, somebody else in the UK Government seems to contradict them, as was the case today. However, it is essential that, as the position develops, Scotland's voice is heard loudly and clearly.

Today, I seek Parliament's agreement to the appointment of a dedicated Government minister whose sole focus will be to represent and protect all of Scotland's interests throughout the process. The role requires someone who is not a shrinking violet, and I hope that Parliament agrees that I have not chosen one to perform the role. As the minister for the negotiations, Michael Russell will require to become almost as familiar with the

corridors of Whitehall as he is with those of Holyrood, but I have no doubt that he will make his presence felt. Michael brings to the position a wealth of experience as a Scottish Government minister. As the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, he completed implementation of curriculum for excellence, expanded free early learning and childcare and led the charge to keep tuition in Scotland free. As the Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution he established Creative Scotland, and as the Minister for Environment he oversaw important reforms to crofting. He has a deep understanding of the European Union's vital importance to all aspects of life in Scotland, from research funding for our universities to international support for our festivals and agricultural payments for our farmers.

In his new role, I have asked Michael Russell to engage, alongside other colleagues, with a wide range of individuals, communities, businesses and organisations to ensure that the broadest range of Scottish interests and concerns are taken into account as we move forward. In tandem with that work, Fiona Hyslop and Alasdair Allan will continue to engage with EU institutions and member states, and I will convene them and other relevant ministers in a new Cabinet sub-committee that will direct all our work on EU-related matters. That, along with the appointment of a new dedicated minister, will ensure that we are fully equipped and ready to protect Scotland's interests in Europe and in discussions with the UK Government.

I am happy to move,

That the Parliament agrees that Michael Russell be appointed as a junior Scottish Minister.

16:56

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): He was spurned and consigned to the back benches just two years ago, cast out from influence and the public eye, but today he sees his career resurrected—yes, like Lazarus. He is the Che Guevara to the First Minister's Evita, the David Essex to her Elaine Paige. He is the rebel returned to the cause, a political romance reset by Brexit. If only the song they sang on the balcony of Bute house was as sweet. Mr Russell returns to the heart of Government, where he decidedly believes he belongs and, in truth, I find myself welcoming his appointment.

Sometime intellectual, sometime muse; classic romantic—some would say romanticist; sometime tartan revolutionary; sometime diplomat, sometime partisan bruiser, Mr Russell is a big beast in a job that requires just that talent. The big decision for the First Minister was not his appointment but the beard. Conventional wisdom has it that no

politician who aspires to be serious and recognised as such will sport a beard. However, this is 2016 and we live surrounded by bearded political giants such as Jeremy Corbyn, David Mundell and—in a rather half-hearted, cultivated stubble sort of way this afternoon—Humza Yousaf.

This is an unforeseen appointment to an unforeseen EU referendum result. Few of us here sought this outcome, even if a million Scots voted with the majority in the United Kingdom to leave. There was, undoubtedly, a leadership vacuum at Westminster following the resignation of the Prime Minister, which was filled by the election of Theresa May. In one of her first acts—which I hope all will welcome—she came to Scotland to meet the First Minister, and the substance of that discussion was that Scotland's voice demands our active representation in the planning of the UK negotiating strategy and beyond.

That requires someone who has the talent and guile to listen to the broader and somewhat contradictory voices in Scotland that will need to be represented and not exclusively to the results of any one party's questionnaire. Undoubtedly, a variable deal for Scotland can be secured, and the tone and sincerity of Mr Russell's participation in the discussions and preparations that will now take place will be crucial. We, on this side, believe him to be the man for the job and welcome and support his appointment this afternoon.

16:59

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Michael Russell's return to office today is not quite the mirror image of that of David Davis in another place, but the parallels may be instructive. Both have been leadership contenders in their respective parties; both have more recently retreated to the back benches; and both have been brought back to the front line by the events of an extraordinary summer.

Do the parallels go further? The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union in the United Kingdom Government will clearly consider it a success if he makes Brexit as definitive and irreversible as he can. There are perhaps some—Nicola Sturgeon seems to have a view on this—in his own party who hope that he will fail and not all of them sit on the back benches.

That is true of David Davis, but what will constitute success for Mr Russell, who is to enjoy the even grander title of Scottish Government Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe? Protecting Scotland's place in Europe is an objective that we share and we welcome the appointment of a minister with that specific task. We have said from the outset that engagement

with UK ministers and other devolved Administrations will be critical to achieving that end. We have also said that the process of engagement in Britain and Europe must be transparent and fully accountable to this Parliament, and we repeat that call today. We look forward to hearing from Mr Russell in due course on what he thinks success will look like in his new post and how he will go about achieving it.

Just as we know that the secretary of state for Brexit is fully committed to exiting the European Union, we expect the minister for UK negotiations to be equally committed to making a success of those negotiations, while recognising the challenges that he will face. That means doing all he can to achieve outcomes that truly respect the wishes of the people of Scotland on all the big issues that we face. On that basis, we welcome today's appointment.

17:01

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): On behalf of the Scottish Greens, I congratulate Mike Russell on his appointment.

Mr Russell followed my first speech in this Parliament by revealing that, in the first vote in the United Kingdom on the European Union, he had defied his own party to vote in. A sympathetic reader of history might say that he was a man ahead of his time in the 1970s—I will not comment on what they might say about the intervening decades, as Mr Carlaw summed it up quite well. On this occasion, however, there will not be much room or much need for defiance of the party line—achieving our common goal will be challenge enough.

It is simply unacceptable that we, as the Parliament of this nation, are forced to contemplate which form of Brexit will be the least worst for our economy, our society and our environment. We must then persuade another Government—one that we did not elect—to choose that option; yesterday, that Government showed how clueless it is about what it has unleashed. It is a simply farcical situation that, yet again, raises questions about where the power over Scotland's future should lie.

The Greens look forward to working with the Scottish Government and other parties who are committed to our continued future in Europe—a future that our electorate voted for with a much larger mandate than for any one party in this Parliament. We look forward to examining every option that will secure that future, including our preferred option of an independent Scotland with its own seat at the European table and of a Scotland that not only fights to retain workers' rights, environmental protections and limited

financial regulation, but can strengthen them here and across this continent. I look forward to working with Mr Russell and others for our common goal of a Scotland with a secure European future.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-01254, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Michael Russell be appointed as a junior Scottish Minister.

The Presiding Officer: I congratulate Mr Russell on his appointment. [*Applause.*]

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move en bloc motions S5M-01264, on variation of standing orders, S5M-01265, on membership of the regional chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and Committee of the Regions, and S5M-01266, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 15 September—

(i) in the first sentence of Rule 13.7.A1 "30 minutes" be replaced with "45 minutes";

and

(ii) in Rule 13.6.2 "6" be replaced with "8".

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposal to nominate, as representatives of the Parliament, Christina McKelvie MSP as a full member and John Scott MSP as an alternate member on the UK delegation to the regional chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and Mairi Evans MSP and John Lamont MSP as full members and Lewis Macdonald MSP and Andy Wightman MSP as alternate members on the UK delegation to the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the parliamentary session to 2021.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jenny Gilruth be appointed to replace Gail Ross as a member of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee.

Bruce Crawford be appointed to replace Michael Russell as a member of the Finance Committee.

Maree Todd be appointed to replace Kate Forbes as a member of the Finance Committee.

Richard Lochhead be appointed to replace Jenny Gilruth as a member of the Education and Skills Committee.

Mairi Evans be appointed to replace Emma Harper as a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Mairi Evans as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee.

Stuart McMillan be appointed to replace Bruce Crawford as a member of the Europe and External Relations Committee.

Emma Harper be appointed to replace Ash Denham as a member of the Europe and External Relations Committee.

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Jenny Gilruth as a member of the Public Audit Committee.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I propose to ask a single question on motions S5M-01264, S5M-01265 and S5M-01266, unless any member objects.

The question is, that motions S5M-01264, on the variation of standing orders, S5M-01265, on membership of the regional chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Committee of the Regions, and S5M-01266, on committee membership, all in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 15 September—

(i) in the first sentence of Rule 13.7.A1 “30 minutes” be replaced with “45 minutes”;

and

(ii) in Rule 13.6.2 “6” be replaced with “8”.

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposal to nominate, as representatives of the Parliament, Christina McKelvie MSP as a full member and John Scott MSP as an alternate member on the UK delegation to the regional chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and Mairi Evans MSP and John Lamont MSP as full members and Lewis Macdonald MSP and Andy Wightman MSP as alternate members on the UK delegation to the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the parliamentary session to 2021.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jenny Gilruth be appointed to replace Gail Ross as a member of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee.

Bruce Crawford be appointed to replace Michael Russell as a member of the Finance Committee.

Maree Todd be appointed to replace Kate Forbes as a member of the Finance Committee.

Richard Lochhead be appointed to replace Jenny Gilruth as a member of the Education and Skills Committee.

Mairi Evans be appointed to replace Emma Harper as a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Mairi Evans as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee.

Stuart McMillan be appointed to replace Bruce Crawford as a member of the Europe and External Relations Committee.

Emma Harper be appointed to replace Ash Denham as a member of the Europe and External Relations Committee.

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Jenny Gilruth as a member of the Public Audit Committee.

Stand Up to Bullying Campaign

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item is a members' business debate on motion S5M-00654, in the name of Fulton MacGregor, on the stand up to bullying campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament supports the Stand Up to Bullying campaign, which is run by the charity, Diana Award; recognises that anyone of any age can be affected by bullying and that there is a growing trend of cyberbullying toward young people; is concerned at figures in a recent poll by Vodafone that suggest that 68% of people know someone who has experience cyberbullying and a YouGov poll suggesting that 81% believe that bullying at school is commonplace, and commends the work of charities such as Diana Award in Coatbridge and Chryston and across Scotland in their attempts to stop bullying.

17:06

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It is a privilege to have the opportunity to lead a debate on what is a very important subject, and I thank colleagues from across the parties for supporting my motion congratulating the Diana Award charity for its stand up to bullying campaign. The Diana Award was set up as a legacy to Princess Diana and her belief that young people have the power to change the world for the better. The aim of the organisation is to inspire and recognise social action in young people across Scotland and the United Kingdom. I think that they deserve tremendous credit for the work that they do. We should also note the fantastic work of the Big Lottery Fund, which recently awarded a grant of £50,000 to the Diana Award as part of a larger programme of grants for anti-bullying measures totalling more than £1 million since 2011. I take this opportunity to encourage colleagues to get involved in the #Back2School campaign that is currently being run by the Diana Award. The campaign encourages children and young people never to suffer in silence. Details can, of course, be found on the Diana Award website.

Scotland's anti-bullying service, respectme, was set up in 2007 by the Scottish Government. It supports local authorities across Scotland in developing anti-bullying policies. They have created a consistent approach to combating bullying across Scotland. In 2015, respectme carried out the largest-ever research into bullying in Scotland and found that 30 per cent of children had experienced some form of bullying in the 2013-14 school year. The findings also showed that 40 per cent of those who had experienced bullying had suffered either partly or wholly online.

It is clear that online bullying is on the rise. Children and young people spend a huge amount of time online and it becomes another world for some. Inhibitions that one might have in person might be forgotten in the virtual world. At a recent meeting with Inspector Andy Thomson from Monklands police, I was encouraged to hear about the child exploitation and online protection project that is being run across Lanarkshire to educate children and young people about the importance of online security. A large focus of that initiative is on making children aware of the dangers of sharing their details and images online. On that note, I congratulate Inspector Thomson and his team on their recent success in being shortlisted in the safer communities awards, in the early intervention and education category, for last night's awards ceremony. I really hope that that drives the issue into a more national setting.

It is worth noting that bullying can happen to anyone at any age; bullying by adults has probably increased with the rise of social media. We as politicians regularly dismiss attacks as being from keyboard warriors, but if we were to look deeper into it, we would likely see that there are elements of harassment. All parts of society must stand up to bullying and, as members of the Scottish Parliament, we must lead by example and challenge any bullying behaviour that we see or hear. We have to look only as far back as Sunday to see the political editor of a Sunday newspaper making jokes about bullying. Individuals in positions of influence—for example, someone who has a large readership and the ability to get a message to tens of thousands of people of all ages—should be using those positions to educate people on the dangers of bullying, rather than sending out the message that it is something to make jokes about in order to get a few laughs or retweets.

Stonewall Scotland—Scotland's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality charity—has made some incredible inroads into the bullying of, and discrimination against, LGBT people in Scotland. However, its research shows that a shocking 99 per cent of children have heard homophobic language at school. It also shows that more than half of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Scotland have suffered homophobic bullying.

There must be a focus on education and we must ensure that everyone—young and old—is aware of the impact that bullying can have. Some people may think that they are just having a laugh or that it is a bit of fun, but research shows that self-harming is on the rise among victims of bullying. We know, as we have seen from recent examples, that in extreme circumstances people can take their own lives as a result of bullying and abuse. Stonewall Scotland's research suggests

that one in four young LGBT people in Scotland has attempted suicide. That is a terrifying statistic, and action must be taken now to stop it.

Half of all suicides among young people are attributed directly to bullying, and bullying victims are two to nine times more likely to attempt suicide. The Scottish Association for Mental Health is Scotland's mental health charity and works closely with anti-bullying organisations on the impact that bullying can have on victims' mental health. There is a drive to raise awareness of the effects of bullying, to deliver training to enable adults to spot the signs, and to provide to children and young people training on the impact of their actions. I encourage all schools and youth organisations to get involved.

September is suicide awareness month, and this Saturday is suicide awareness day. I encourage all members to get involved in raising awareness and to wear yellow on Saturday. I have decided to wear my yellow tie today.

The Scottish Government should be commended on the action that it has taken since 2007 in combating bullying across the country. The campaigns to raise awareness are having great success, but there is still more to be done.

As I mentioned, bullying and harassment are increasingly moving to online settings, which means that bullying is even harder to notice when the victim does not speak out. Projects such as the one that is run by Inspector Thomson, which I mentioned, are a great example of the work that is being done and should be replicated across the country.

The message must be clear and it must be loud: bullying is not acceptable. If you experience it or see someone else being bullied, speak out: tell someone and never suffer in silence.

I will finish with respectme's mission statement. It is a powerful message that everyone should note:

"You don't have to like me...agree with me...or enjoy doing the same things I do...But you have to respect me!"

17:12

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate today and to raise awareness of the credible stand up to bullying campaign.

It is easy to think of bullying in a very set way. I am sure that the image that springs to most people's minds is of the school bully harassing his or her peers outside the school gates. Although that undoubtedly occurs and we should be doing everything that we can to stop it, I want to highlight—as the previous member did—the

effects that bullying has on people of all ages and backgrounds.

In recent years, bullying has taken on new forms through social media and the internet. I was deeply disturbed to learn back in July about the death of a young girl from Glasgow—Britney Mazzoncini—who as a result of cyberbullying took her own life at the age of just 16. Another Glasgow teenager attempted to take his own life only last month as a result of online bullying.

Time and again, I hear jibes and comments to the effect that victims of cyberbullying should simply turn off their computers. Fulton MacGregor referred in his speech to that attitude, which I find frustrating—as, I am sure, many others do. The simpler solution is that bullying should not occur in the first place.

I am pleased that Police Scotland is taking steps to tackle bullying. It put out a statement last month warning parents that they must prepare their children for the dangers of bullying, and referred them to a number of useful websites including respectme.org.uk, getsafeonline.org and thinkuknow.co.uk. The statement assured them that internet trolls would be traced and prosecuted for their actions online. However, I am under no illusions about the fact that more still needs to be done, which is why I support Fulton MacGregor's motion on raising awareness of cyberbullying.

To link back to my original point, I was pleased to see the efforts of the University of Glasgow, which carried out a notable campaign last year seeking to widen people's knowledge of bullying and looking at what can be done. The university launched on its campus an anti-bullying campaign to tackle casual discrimination among students and staff. The full stop campaign highlighted offensive comments that were not necessarily deemed to be blatantly offensive by using posters that set out example quotes in isolation.

I turn my attention now to issues around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex bullying. Members of all parties in the chamber believe that LGBTI bullying must come to an end. As an LGBTI person, I suffered bullying at school. That was quite some time ago when I was 13, but 30 years on we are still speaking about it. How do we make it better? How do we get the situation resolved and put a stop to it?

TIE—time for inclusive education—campaign's research reported that 64 per cent of LGBT youth reported being bullied as a result of their gender identity or sexual orientation, and that a shocking 37 per cent had attempted suicide at least once as a result of being bullied. To tackle the issue, TIE has called for cross-party working groups. I know that there is cross-party support among members and that, at Glasgow's pride march a few weeks

ago, there was a full show of support. I would like to see the issue being tackled across all parties, and the implementation of LGBT-inclusive education as a legislative matter. TIE's proposals are great and I would like the topic to be debated in the chamber in the future.

I echo the sentiments that have been shown by everyone in the chamber on the stand up to bullying campaign. I also congratulate Diana Award for its efforts. As with most things, awareness is crucial—I hope that the campaign will go some way to altering mindsets.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you Ms Wells. I call Elaine Smith to be followed by the minister, who will sum up. [*Interruption.*] I beg your pardon. I have been too quick.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I would be happy to defer to Ms Smith, if you wish, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry. How dare I miss you out?

17:16

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I hope that that was not bullying from the chair; I know that it was not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It certainly was not.

Stewart Stevenson: The subject is a serious one and, like many other members' business debates, I expect that there will be no disagreement among members on the issue.

I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on giving us the opportunity to debate such an important subject. The problem is not confined to Scotland or to these islands; it is an international problem. In the past month, UNICEF released figures that showed that two thirds of young people surveyed in more than 18 countries have been victims of bullying.

How do people come to be bullied? It is mostly because of issues over which they have no control, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or physical appearance. Even if it does not involve touching the victim, bullying is a form of violence and we should treat it as seriously as we treat any violence.

Bullying is also an attack on diversity. Diversity has huge value: the greater the diversity in our communities, the greater their strength and ability to respond to changing circumstances.

Bullying, particularly for youngsters, can endure well into adulthood and for the rest of their lives. It is not to be treated trivially or ignored. It can lead

to depression, academic failure and changes in the behaviour of the people who are being bullied. Fear follows from bullying.

Mental health will, of course, be affected by being bullied. Furthermore, the behaviour will be copied. If bullying is tolerated, others will see that it goes unpunished and will themselves be open to potentially becoming bullies.

In the modern electronic world, we have some particular concerns about the new ways in which people can be bullied, such as via social media, emails, texting and so on. There are some particular things that are different about social media. First, adults do not understand social media in the same way as youngsters do. An adult's moderating influence means that they might understand what is going on in a bully's mind. However, the situation is likely to be less clear cut than with the physical bullying that we have been used to in the past.

Similarly, the use of social media tends to be a solitary activity. There will be no one sitting next to the person who is seeking to bully someone online—no moderating influence of someone looking over their shoulder and saying, "Hey Jimmy, that's enough. Perhaps we should head off."

It is also an activity that, being solitary, takes place—in many cases—late at night, when drink may have been taken. There are all sorts of disinhibitions associated with the bully that are distinctly different and more threatening in the online world.

Is there anything that we can do about it? Well, yes. Perhaps the social media providers could help by monitoring what is actually going on in social media. We know that the technology is there—Twitter, for example, has a regular banner showing what is trending. In other words, it knows what is going on. Perhaps it is time that Twitter and other social media providers took a look at whether they can help to detect and inhibit bullying through that medium.

I congratulate the stand up to bullying campaign on its actions. I hope that we, too, can be part of the effort to promote a kinder and more understanding society and that this debate makes its modest contribution to that. However, we all have a duty to stand up to oppressive behaviour, because that is what bullying is.

17:21

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing a debate on this important matter. As we have heard, cyberbullying is a key issue that is

increasing in relevance every year in Scotland and we should all take it very seriously.

Nowadays, bullying does not stop at the school gate and its victims are not limited to young people, as Fulton MacGregor noted. Bullying occurs in homes, wider communities, boardrooms, lunchrooms, stadiums and pubs. It is all around us. Of course, bullying also exists online—we know that. Such bullying can involve a persistent and unrelenting attack and it often targets those who are already vulnerable in one way or another.

Access to technology—specifically, the use of mobile devices—means that those who are being bullied online cannot even go home to a safe haven and shut the door on the bullies, because those bullies are with them constantly.

Such bullying can, as we know, have tragic results, including suicide, among the young people who are the victims of sustained online abuse, particularly when it is from their peers. Annie Wells mentioned that in her speech.

To raise the issues in debates such as this one is a good step on the way to addressing the very modern scourge of cyberbullying, but more work is needed right across society—Stewart Stevenson made some particularly interesting points about that.

We should recognise and commend the work that has been done by the Diana Award, as mentioned in the motion, by other charities in our communities and in particular by the stand up to bullying campaign. However, in order to adequately tackle cyberbullying, we need to raise awareness more widely about the negative consequences of personal attacks on others that are perpetrated from behind the barrier of a computer screen or a mobile phone.

We have all heard stories of schoolyard bullying and attacks via phones or social media. In some cases, it strays into direct harassment, but public awareness of the difference between joking around and the more serious charge of harassment is often pretty poor. If we can increase knowledge both of the outcomes and of prevention, it is possible that we can eventually begin to bring an end to this worrying phenomenon.

While recognising that, we should also consider the effect that such abuse—or trolling, as it is sometimes called—has on adults, especially those who have to use social media for their jobs or simply as a means of necessary communication. They cannot just turn off their technology to get away from it.

I think and hope that we are finally beginning to gain a better understanding of how sexism, for example, can hurt women online, but we need to

extend that understanding to include all forms of identity abuse. Some of that has already been mentioned in the debate.

Being careful with the use of language is very important. Offensive comments cannot just be dismissed as banter. As parliamentarians, we also need to look at new forms of bullying that might fly under the radar as technology develops and open our minds to the fact that the victims of cyberbullying are as diverse as they are numerous.

Among young people in particular, cyberbullying can lead to prolonged absenteeism from school as well as negative consequences for physical and mental health. Of course, such effects on health and wellbeing can also occur in anyone of any age who is experiencing cyberbullying.

If we do our best to address the individual and specific concerns of victims, that will go a long way to changing the narrative around online bullying. However, I give one word of caution: when we are doing that, we must be careful not to unjustly criminalise certain sections of society, specifically the young, as some interventions have tended to do in the past.

Thank you, Presiding Officer, for calling me to speak in the debate. I once again congratulate Fulton MacGregor on this really important debate.

17:25

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): I thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the subject of bullying to the chamber. Let me be absolutely clear that bullying of any kind is completely unacceptable and, when it happens, we all have a responsibility to address it. We need to intervene to deal with it quickly and effectively.

Before we talk about what is being done to address bullying, it is important to remind us all of the positive lives and contributions of young people. The latest behaviour in Scottish schools research shows that the overwhelming majority of children in Scotland's schools are generally well behaved; an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report tells us that Scottish students are resilient; and further research from the health behaviour in Scottish schools survey tells us that Scottish young people report high life satisfaction.

Nevertheless, we must make sure that children and young people who are affected by bullying are supported effectively. A number of speakers have spoken in particular about the impact that bullying can have on children's and young people's mental health. That is one reason why the Government is bringing forward a 10-year strategy for children's and adolescents' health and wellbeing, which will

focus on physical and mental health. The fact that we have a dedicated mental health minister in the Government demonstrates our strong commitment in the area.

Our document "A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People" has children's rights at its centre, and it provides a focus for all anti-bullying work across Scotland. The document makes it clear that, as well as intervening when bullying happens, we need to tackle the root cause and help to change negative views and poor perceptions so that we can prevent bullying from happening in the first place.

In recent years, Scotland has seen legislative and policy changes that have put greater focus on supporting our children's and young people's wellbeing, which is why we are refreshing our anti-bullying guidance. In that, we are supported by key stakeholders, including respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service for children and young people, which the Government established and which we fund to provide support across all Scotland's local authorities and schools.

The Government believes that there is no place in Scotland for prejudice or discrimination and that everyone deserves to be treated fairly. We must continue unrelentingly to tackle prejudice and discrimination and to promote equality and diversity. That work begins early, in schools. The refresh of the national approach to anti-bullying will be clearer about the impact of prejudice-based bullying, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and how schools and youth organisations can respond appropriately to it.

Health and wellbeing are at the core of the school curriculum, and relationships, sexual health and parenthood education is, in turn, key to health and wellbeing education. In 2014, we published guidance that clearly states how important it is that relationships, sexual health and parenthood education addresses diversity and reflects issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people—or children with LGBTI parents—such as same-sex marriage and hate-crime reporting.

Annie Wells asked about the work that will be taken forward. The Government will continue to work with a range of organisations to ensure that schools address the important issues that LGBTI young people face, and we will ensure that teachers have the skills, knowledge and confidence to embed inclusive approaches in their schools.

Through addressing prejudice-based bullying and promoting an inclusive approach to relationships, sexual health and parenthood education, children will learn about tolerance,

respect and equality, which will help to address and prevent prejudice. Moreover, the recently published “Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland” confirmed our commitment to a review of initial teacher education programmes. That will ensure that appropriate detail on equality is provided across the primary and secondary sectors. Working with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, more support for teachers on equality issues is provided through career-long professional learning.

It is vital that our refreshed anti-bullying policy is informed by the views and experiences of children, including the more than 8,000 children and young people who responded to respectme’s 2014 survey. Of the children who told us that they had experienced bullying, the vast majority knew the person who was bullying them, whether online or offline. In fact, young people do not refer to bullying online as cyberbullying—bullying is bullying wherever it takes place, and we must remember that the online world is part and parcel of our children’s and young people’s lives.

That fact gets to the heart of the point that a number of speakers made about the attitude that people should just turn off the computer or not go to a particular website. First of all, that misses the point that we should not put the onus on the victim rather than the perpetrator to address their behaviour. It also fundamentally misunderstands the importance that access to the internet and social media often has for young people. We must do all that we can to ensure that they are safe, resilient and equipped to respond to the challenges and opportunities that being a young person today brings.

Fulton MacGregor highlighted the rise in online bullying. The Government is committed to making the internet a safer place for children and young people. We want them to enjoy the internet and all that it has to offer. We also want them to stay in control and know what to do and who to go to if they feel at risk. That is why we have committed to refreshing our internet safety action plan and linking it with our strategies on digital participation and cyberresilience so that appropriate frameworks of training, support and information are in place for professionals and parents as well as children and young people.

Stewart Stevenson made an important point on the role of social media providers in relation to the bullying that can often take place on their platforms. Those providers, many of which are multibillion-dollar companies, need to ensure that the users of their platforms are safe in the interactions that they undertake and that any behaviour that risks encouraging bullying or other forms of harassment is stamped down on as soon

as possible. Enough evidence exists to suggest that the response by the providers is often at best sluggish and, at worst, non-existent. They need to do more to tackle that.

Elaine Smith rightly highlighted the dangers that can exist for children and young people in the online world. However, it is also important to remember that the internet is a fundamental part of the lives of children and young people today and can be a fantastic source of education and entertainment. It is often also the first place to which they go to talk to their friends and, indeed, to meet new friends. I encourage young people, while being cognisant of the risks that exist, to embrace the internet’s huge potential for expanding their horizons.

Like, I am sure, every member present, I want a Scotland where young people can enjoy all the positive aspects that new technology and social media bring without the fear of being bullied or exploited and where young people form healthy relationships and value diversity. I want a Scotland where our children and young people can grow up in a safe environment in which their rights and needs are respected and protected and a Scotland where every child and young person is supported to be who they want to be, is treated equally, enjoys equal chances and choices in all aspects of their lives and is valued for the contribution that they make to our society and communities.

I thank again Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber and all speakers for their contributions. We all have a role to play in the matter and I am sure that we will all continue to work together to ensure that our children’s lives are as safe as they can be.

Meeting closed at 17:32.

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