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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 8 February 2017**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 February 2017

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Economy, Jobs and Fair Work

#### Economic Performance

1. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it measures economic performance. (S5O-00639)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** The Scottish Government uses the national performance framework and Scotland performs to help to monitor and assess Scotland's overall economic performance. Those contain indicators that assess Scotland's performance across a number of dimensions, including economic growth, productivity and participation in the labour market.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving Scotland's economic performance. Scotland's economic strategy sets out our framework for doing so, based on the twin objectives of boosting competitiveness and tackling inequality.

**Annie Wells:** In its latest Scotland performs document, which was published alongside the draft budget, the Scottish Government was found to be stagnating or getting worse in 46 out of the 47 key indicators that it set itself. Does the cabinet secretary consider that to be a success? If not, can he explain to members the reasons for the abysmal performance?

**Keith Brown:** It is nice to hear the Conservatives talking so positively, as always, about Scotland's economy. Annie Wells could have pointed out that the employment rate of 73.6 per cent for quarter 3 of 2016 was the second-highest across all United Kingdom countries. She could also have pointed out that the total income that was received by Scottish households increased over that period. The ratio of the income of the top 10 per cent compared to that of the bottom 40 per cent increased from 112 to 115. She could have pointed out, too, that the gender pay gap was 6.2 per cent, which is a decrease of 1.48 percentage points, or she could even have pointed out that the value of Scottish exports increased by 3.6 per cent over that for 2014. That was an increase of 4.4 per cent in relation to exports to the rest of the UK and 4.4 per cent in relation to the rest of the European Union—and

there was a 3.4 per cent increase in those to elsewhere. Those are very positive figures, but I acknowledge that there are others that are challenging.

However, it is only fair to recognise two important facts. First, there are positive figures and, secondly, another Government is active in the Scottish economy. We have heard for a long time from the Conservatives that we must use the new powers that we are getting, but the UK Government had those powers before we did. What did it do with them?

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I will focus on one target that the Scottish Government has adopted, which is that productivity should move from the third quartile to the first quartile by 2017 compared to other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. I understand that that target has been missed, that we remain in the third quartile and that we have fallen from 18th to 19th place. Why has the Scottish Government failed to meet that target?

**Keith Brown:** What Jackie Baillie said is perfectly true in that we have remained in the third quartile and have not gone into the first quartile. I have mentioned that a number of times in the chamber, in particular in relation to the review that we are currently conducting of our enterprise and skills organisations. However, it would have been useful if Jackie Baillie had acknowledged that there has been a 4.4 per cent increase in productivity in Scotland but no increase whatsoever in the rest of the UK.

Missing the target is not good enough and, in such a circumstance, we have to look at what we are currently doing. That is exactly what we are doing in our review of the enterprise and skills agencies and in relation to the £500 million Scottish growth scheme that will help to drive increased productivity, competitiveness and internationalisation.

#### Marine Energy Development

2. **Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to assist marine energy developers. (S5O-00640)

**The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse):** The Scottish Government and its enterprise agencies continue to offer significant support to the marine energy sector in Scotland. The renewable energy investment fund and wave energy Scotland initiatives alone have so far provided £57 million to wave and tidal projects.

The decision by the UK Government in November 2016 that it would not be providing ring-fenced support for wave and tidal technologies in

the second contracts for difference allocation round came as a blow to many marine energy developers. Following the announcement, I convened a round-table discussion with industry representatives and UK Government officials, to understand industry priorities. I reiterated the Scottish Government's strong commitment to the development of a successful marine energy industry and to maintaining our current global lead.

Scottish ministers will continue to use the powers that we have to support the growth of the sector, and we are willing to work with the UK Government and industry to explore possible solutions. I have proposed that Scotland hosts a new working group to replace the UK Government's defunct marine energy programme board, in order to find a way forward. Work is currently under way to agree the remit, membership and terms of reference of the new group.

**Ben Macpherson:** I share the minister's concerns about the UK Government's CFD allocations. The minister is aware of Nova Innovation in my constituency. Could the minister update me on the assistance that the Scottish Government is providing to find a site for the deployment of Nova Innovation's next phase of world-leading tidal energy devices, which will provide numerous employment opportunities and contribute significantly to our having a low-carbon economy by 2050?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I recognise that Nova Innovation is a very forward-thinking company that has done excellent work of late, and has had a successful year. I understand the technical parameters of the site that Nova Innovation is looking for, but for reasons of commercial confidentiality, I will not go into detail here. An enhanced account team approach is being used to engage with Nova Innovation. That approach pulls together the perspectives of Scottish Enterprise's company growth and REIF—renewable energy investment fund—teams and Highlands and Islands Enterprise's water team.

There is a proposal by SE and HIE to review all the available sites that can accommodate wave and tidal projects up to 2022, which will include currently owned sites and potential smaller-scale community sites. A meeting was arranged with officials to discuss that with the Crown Estate on 1 February but, due to illness of one of the attendees, the meeting will take place on Monday 13 February.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** Scottish Enterprise lost more than £30 million of public funding when two wave power companies went into liquidation. What steps has the Scottish National Party Government taken to ensure that

lessons were learned and that investment in wave power delivers good value for money?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I recognise Maurice Golden's genuine interest in the issue, but it is somewhat rich of him to ask that because the UK Government is responsible for some of the parlous conditions that the wave-energy sector has faced in Scotland. If he is sincere in his wishes, and I believe that he is, he needs to make representations to UK ministers, and to follow the Scottish Government's lead in urging Greg Clark to provide a route to market and sincere support for our wave and tidal energy. Only the Scottish Government is stepping in to help that industry at the moment; the UK Government is doing next to nothing to support a vital industry for our islands.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I would echo much of the sentiment that the minister expressed. In relation to supporting innovation, has there been any progress in discussions with the UK Government about setting up a CFD pot for innovation, including for wave and tidal power, but perhaps also for storage technologies that could benefit from support at this critical time?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I know that Liam McArthur has a strong and long-standing interest in that issue, which severely affects his constituency. We are in continuing dialogue with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and with UK Government ministers on that. We will see whether any opportunities arise out of the UK industrial strategy, given that one of the challenge pots relates to energy projects. Centres of excellence such as EMEC—the European Marine Energy Centre—are world leading, so we hope that UK Government ministers will support a strong bid from the Scottish industry for funding for innovation in the sector. We live in hope that we will see some form of support for wave and tidal technologies, but that will depend on decisions that are made by UK ministers.

### **NCR (Potential Redundancies)**

**3. Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it can offer the employees of NCR in Dundee who are facing potential redundancy. (S5O-00641)

**The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse):** I understand that NCR has commenced consultation of its employees regarding the company's future restructuring plans. We have contacted NCR to offer support for any employees who might face redundancy through our partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative. The company has stated that it will make contact to discuss PACE support, depending on the outcome of the consultation, and I do not want to prejudge the consultation.

Through providing skills development and employability support, PACE aims to minimise the time that individuals who are affected by redundancy are out of work. PACE has an excellent record in achieving positive outcomes for those who are affected by redundancy.

As the member would expect, Scottish Enterprise stands ready to work with NCR management to safeguard employment at the Dundee site.

**Bill Bowman:** Over the past few weeks, news has been reported of other redundancies and relocations in Dundee, and it is a worrying time for the people concerned. Following yesterday's news that the city has the lowest employment rate of any city in the United Kingdom, what support can the Scottish Government offer the city of Dundee to help to boost job creation?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Companies such as NCR, Tokheim and Michelin Tyre have been success stories for Dundee, and we have provided funding support to key employers in Dundee through the Scottish Enterprise account management process in order to ensure that we have targeted help for companies as they grow or as they take on new market challenges. I assure Bill Bowman and other members who have an interest in the economy of Dundee that the Scottish Government is very sincere about supplying support to key employers in the area. Whether it is skills support or support for export development of the kind that the cabinet secretary outlined in his earlier answer on the Scottish growth scheme, we always try to support companies in local economies, such as Dundee's, to succeed and thrive. I take such matters very seriously. If examples of them arise, PACE and our wider Scottish Government family of enterprise and skills agencies are there to intervene and help.

#### Tay Cities Deal (Angus)

4. **Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how Angus will benefit from the Tay cities deal. (S5O-00642)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** I am delighted by the strategic partnership working across four councils that is clearly reflected in the Tay cities region deal proposal. Just last week, I had the opportunity to meet the chief executive of Angus Council and others to hear first-hand about their emerging city region deal proposals. I also had the pleasure of hearing how Angus sees its role in contributing to, and benefiting from, sustainable inclusive economic growth, through that collaborative approach.

**Graeme Dey:** The cabinet secretary will be aware of proposals in the city deal to establish in

Arbroath an east of Scotland hub of the proposed national manufacturing institute of Scotland. The aims of that are to increase investment and innovation, encourage greater internationalisation of Angus and Tayside's engineering and advanced manufacturing sector, upskill the existing workforce and create more apprenticeships. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that has the potential to give the town and the wider region a significant economic boost and is worthy of being pursued?

**Keith Brown:** There are some very interesting proposals—not least in terms of the life sciences' relationship with the University of Dundee and its success in that area, and in terms of other interests in Angus.

Generally, the proposals are very much in harmony with the significant developing proposals for the national manufacturing institute of Scotland, which has the potential to support step changes in the efficiency and productivity of Scotland's manufacturing sector. Decisions on its establishment and location will depend on the business case, which will be published later this year. Wherever the constituent parts of the institute are located, we are determined that it will be for the benefit of the whole of Scotland.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** How will Mid Fife and Glenrothes benefit from the Tay and Edinburgh city deals respectively?

**Keith Brown:** Jenny Gilruth's question highlights a very unusual point, which is that Fife Council is a partner in two potential city deals. We clearly welcome regional partners working together with others on long-term strategic proposals that seek to deliver inclusive economic growth. It is natural that Mid Fife and Glenrothes should look to Edinburgh and Dundee as major centres of employment. We are very comfortable to see Fife working as part of both those city regions, as proposals are developed.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Question 5 has not been lodged.

#### Export Statistics

6. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recently published report, "Export Statistics Scotland 2015". (S5O-00644)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** The Scottish Government welcomes the latest export figures for Scotland. They show that, despite challenging times for the global economy, our total international exports, excluding oil and gas, increased by £1 billion in one year. We are working with our partners to deliver Scotland's

trade and investment strategy in order to further improve our exporting performance and to ensure that we are seen to be an outward-facing nation that is open for business.

**Anas Sarwar:** I am pleased to hear that the cabinet secretary accepts and welcomes the findings of “Export Statistics Scotland 2015”. The report finds that 63 per cent of Scotland’s exports go to the rest of the United Kingdom and that 16 per cent of our exports go to other parts of the European Union. Will the minister therefore explain his economic incoherence and why he believes that our reaction to leaving the EU single market is to have another referendum and attempt to leave Scotland’s biggest and most important market: the UK, which is four times the size of the EU single market? Does that not expose the fact that the cabinet secretary is looking not for economic coherence but for grudge and grievance and to leave the UK? [*Interruption.*]

**Keith Brown:** The applause from members on the Conservative benches tells its own story. Yesterday, we saw political incoherence when three of the Labour Party’s members voted to withdraw from the EU market. I do not know why Anas Sarwar wants to support the withdrawal from the EU market.

We do not believe that we should withdraw from the EU market. We think that it is an extremely important market—it is eight times the size of the UK market. We also believe that we should continue and expand our growth in the rest of the UK. Interestingly, the rest of the UK exports more into Scotland than we export to the rest of the UK. It is an extremely important market and only a fool would want that choice to be made. We think that we should continue to export to both and we should increase our exports. As I said in response to Jackie Baillie’s question, our efforts are designed to achieve further exports. What would be the motivation for somebody to promote or talk up a trade war between Scotland and the UK? I will leave that to the economic incoherence of Anas Sarwar. We want to trade with everybody and do more of it.

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** I remind members of my role as the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work.

For Scotland’s economy to thrive and prosper, we need to grow exports to all our markets. Anyone who presents a false choice between exporting to the UK market as an alternative to the EU market fails to understand business or politics and does a great disservice to Scottish business through their lack of ambition for our economy. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the proposals contained in the Scottish Government’s document “Scotland’s Place in Europe” would

enable Scotland to continue to trade with the UK and the EU single markets on the same terms as we do today, and that it offers businesses in the rest of the UK the opportunity to trade with the EU on favourable terms by basing themselves in Scotland? That is a win-win for all concerned.

**Keith Brown:** First, it is refreshing to hear members diligently recording their interests when they are speaking. That is a lesson that could be learned by other members.

I reject any suggestion that Scotland should face a choice between trading with the rest of the UK and trading with the EU. The Conservatives’ position is preposterous. Theresa May says, “We want to trade with everybody but, in certain circumstances, we will not trade with Scotland,” and the Labour Party has unfortunately bought into that nonsense. There is no reason why Scotland should not increase its exports, as it has been doing. There has been a 4.4 per cent increase in relation to the rest of the UK, and the same in relation to the rest of the EU.

We might think that the Labour Party would want to welcome that, but instead we hear the same old thing—talking Scotland down. We will continue to promote Scotland and to increase exports, and Labour members can continue to talk Scotland down.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** In yesterday’s debate, the Scottish Government told us that there will be a hard Brexit, resulting in a customs border between the UK and the EU. If that is true, what side of that customs border does Mr Brown want Scotland to be on? Does he want to be on the UK domestic market side, which accounts for two-thirds of our domestic trade, or does he want to be on the European side, which accounts for 16 per cent of our exports? He cannot have both. Based on his own analysis that there is going to be a customs border and on feedback from senior EU officials, he cannot have both. Which is it?

**Keith Brown:** If the Conservative Party’s message is that we cannot have both, could it at least be honest with the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland? That is not what the Conservatives are saying to those people. They are explicitly being told that they can have both, so what is so different about the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland?

Of course we can have both. We have said that we would prefer the UK to stay in the single market. If it does not want to do that, that is the UK’s decision. We want to stay in the single market. It is only the Tories who are talking about erecting borders. Theresa May said:

“We want to buy your goods and services, sell you ours, trade with you as freely as possible, and work with one



another to make sure we are all safer, more secure and more prosperous”.

The Scottish Government is looking after the interests of the people of Scotland and I suggest that the Scottish Tories could learn a lesson and do the same thing.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 7 was not lodged.

#### “Report on the Economic Impact of Leaving the European Union”

**8. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee’s “Report on the Economic Impact of Leaving the European Union”. (S5O-00646)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** The Scottish Government welcomes the committee’s report on the economic impact of leaving the EU and in particular notes its recommendations and conclusions.

We have been clear about the risks that Brexit poses to the economy. That is why in recent months we have announced steps to invest an additional £100 million in capital projects in the current financial year to help stimulate growth. We are also establishing a new £500 million Scottish growth scheme to support small and medium-sized enterprises in particular, and we are taking forward a range of measures through the budget.

The Scottish Government has always been clear that remaining in Europe is the best option for our future. In December, we published a detailed set of proposals in “Scotland’s Place in Europe”, our plan for dealing with the consequences of Brexit. The plan outlines our proposal that, first and foremost, the United Kingdom Government should negotiate for the UK as a whole to retain single market membership but that, if the United Kingdom Government will not do that, as the Prime Minister has indeed indicated, we urge the United Kingdom Government to put forward a differentiated approach so that Scotland can stay within the EU.

**John Mason:** Did the cabinet secretary notice in the report the committee’s concern, reflecting the concerns of a lot of witnesses, about the dangers that are presented by the possibility that EU workers will no longer be able to come to Scotland to work? We heard concerns to that effect from Walker’s Shortbread, Angus Soft Fruits, Denholm Seafood, Scottish Leather Group, Scottish Engineering and Scottish Care, all of which were concerned about not having workers from the EU.

**Keith Brown:** I am concerned about that issue. I suggest that there are sectors in addition to those that John Mason mentioned that share those concerns. Earlier today, I had a meeting with a number of substantial insurance companies that are extremely concerned about the issue. Of course, the higher education sector is also extremely concerned.

The 181,000 EU citizens who have chosen to make their home in Scotland enrich our culture and also strengthen our society and boost our economy. As the committee’s report makes clear, those workers make a vital contribution across a range of sectors. That is why the Scottish Government is exploring all possible avenues by which Scotland can retain the benefits of EU membership, for which Scotland voted.

The Scottish Parliament’s Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee has also noted the important contribution of EU migrants to Scotland and has called for Scotland to be allowed its own separate immigration deal after Brexit. I call on the United Kingdom Government and the Conservative Party in this place to at least say that all EU citizens in Scotland should be given a guarantee that their place in Scotland is secure.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** When the cabinet secretary gave evidence to the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, he said:

“We have responded to the situation, but we have not changed the economic strategy.”—[*Official Report, Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee*, 29 November 2016; c 34.]

The committee’s unanimous finding, set out in paragraph 147 of the report, is that:

“In light of evidence heard by the Committee on the changing economic landscape following the decision to leave the EU, we recommend that the Scottish Government’s economic strategy should be reviewed.”

Will the cabinet secretary now institute a review of his Government’s economic strategy?

**Keith Brown:** Richard Leonard neglects to mention something else that I said at the committee, which was that the actions that we take and the initiatives that we are involved in will of course have to respond to the change in circumstance. However, I think that an economic strategy that seeks to promote inclusive and sustainable growth is the right one for Scotland. That was examined during the course of the enterprise and skills review.

We are doubling the number of Scottish Development International representatives across the European Union, increasing the number of offices that we have and increasing the trade promotion activity that we take part in, not least

through the establishment of the board of trade. Of course we will respond differently to the circumstances, but the economic strategy is the right one.

## Finance and the Constitution

### Non-domestic Rates (Support for Businesses)

1. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to support businesses that will see their non-domestic rates bills increase from April 2017. (S5O-00649)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** The Scottish Government has set out a highly competitive non-domestic rates package as part of the 2017-18 budget. That includes reducing the rates poundage by 3.7 per cent to 46.6p, expanding the small business bonus scheme so that it lifts 100,000 properties out of rates altogether and raising the threshold for the large business supplement so that fewer than 10 per cent of properties pay it.

We are not insisting on a revenue-neutral revaluation, which would have meant setting a higher poundage, and we are not proposing a nationwide transitional relief scheme, as such a scheme would mean many smaller businesses funding reductions for a few large utility companies. However councils can use powers that were granted under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to apply further rates reductions locally, separate from the Government-funded reliefs that I have just touched upon.

**Daniel Johnson:** In other parts of the United Kingdom, Governments are putting in place transitional measures to support companies that are seeing their rates bills rise. However, the cabinet secretary will not do the same for Scotland, calling transitional arrangements a “blunt instrument”, as he did in committee this morning. That will be no help to the City nursery in my constituency, whose rates evaluation will go from £38,000 to £64,000, with costs likely to be passed on to parents, resulting in increasing childcare costs. Indeed, bills are set to rise by 64 per cent for nurseries across Edinburgh, including 38 nurseries whose bills will more than double. Will the cabinet secretary rethink his approach on transitional relief?

**Derek Mackay:** This is an important issue and Mr Johnson puts a fair question in raising individual circumstances. However, I believe that the issue must be put into context if we are to understand why a transitional rates relief scheme is not appropriate.

Of course, the decisions of assessors are independent, and, as such, the rating evaluations will have been independent of Government. Some values will have increased; some will have decreased. Those for whom they increase can appeal.

It would be wrong to suggest that we are increasing business rates. We are not; we are actually reducing business rates by about 3.7 per cent by not insisting on a revenue-neutral revaluation. If I had insisted on an increase, that would have meant higher bills. Taking together all the decisions around the changes to the small business bonus, the large business supplement and the poundage, the Government is forgoing £155 million that we could have received if I had not taken those decisions.

Further, the national package of rates relief is £600 million. Specifically on transitional rates relief, I say again that if we had gone ahead with a transitional relief scheme—whether to do so is the Government’s choice and happens automatically south of the border—many businesses across Scotland would have paid business rates that were artificially higher to compensate mainly big utility companies but also some others.

I feel that the balance is fair and proportionate and ensures that many businesses that are entitled to rates relief and to their rates going down actually see that happen. As a consequence of our decisions, more than 70 per cent of Scottish properties will pay the same or less than they do currently. In addition to all the national reliefs that I have described, the Ken Barclay review will consider all the issues in relation to business rates. I am interested in the methodology of some of the determinations around that.

I identified the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 because I think it is right that councils feel empowered to use that act to apply local reliefs that may be right for local circumstances. Perth and Kinross Council has already used the power, and councils now have additional resources from the stage 1 budget. I will continue to engage with business.

I apologise for the length of that answer, Presiding Officer, but I believe that the question is a very important and fair one, and businesses should hear about some of the support that is available to help them through what will be, for some of them, quite a difficult time. However, I think that when the matter is set in context all members can see why I have arrived at my decisions.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** How many more businesses will benefit from different forms of rates relief this year compared with last year?

**Derek Mackay:** As I touched on in my previous, detailed answer, more than half of all businesses will pay no rates whatever and, for the first time, more than 100,000 businesses will be exempt from business rates as a consequence of the small business bonus.

On the large business supplement, 8,000 businesses will be taken out of that rate as a consequence of our changing the threshold to £51,000.

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I declare an interest, as a current and serving councillor on Aberdeen City Council.

Given that the First Minister has refused to meet council leaders and businesses in Aberdeen today, can the cabinet secretary update the Parliament on the discussions that he has had with Aberdeen City Council and with the spotlight group, which has raised the serious concerns of local businesses about the damage that will be caused to the regional economy by the rise in business rates?

**Derek Mackay:** I hope that Ross Thomson reflects on the information that I have just given the Parliament on the national situation. I am absolutely engaged with Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce. What has been described as a fiery meeting was actually a very constructive and helpful one.

Businesses in the region asked the Scottish Government and local authorities to work together on the issue, and that is absolutely what I have done. I have worked across party lines, engaging with the administrations of Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to explain the national situation and to share information—as I have just done—while empowering them and giving them the support that they require to design an appropriate local relief scheme. They have received that very positively.

Let us set aside the political point scoring. There is a window of opportunity to work together to put an adequate scheme in place in advance of the next financial year. I am confident that both councils are working on such a scheme. My latest understanding is that Aberdeenshire may well be able to provide a scheme before the city council can, but I am advised that both councils are working on the issue.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The cabinet secretary may have seen the announcement from Scottish Renewables that a number of small renewables projects are set to see rates rises of up to 650 per cent, putting into doubt future investment in a number of smaller hydro, wind and solar projects. Can he provide an assurance that he is discussing with his ministerial

colleague Paul Wheelhouse the point that such rate rises must not cut across the objectives that we all want to be met in delivering on the climate change plan and the energy strategy?

**Derek Mackay:** I accept that point. There has been an expansion in rural rates relief and the small business bonus scheme, and there are advantages around community ownership, but the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy and I are continuing to discuss and engage on that specific issue. I am interested in how local relief schemes may be deployed to help individual projects. All of that is still under active consideration.

### **Educational Attainment Funding (North Ayrshire)**

2. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much additional funding it will provide to North Ayrshire Council in 2017-18 to improve educational attainment. (S5O-00650)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** North Ayrshire Council is one of nine Scottish attainment challenge authorities, and it received more than £3.5 million for 2016-17 to deliver an authority-wide plan that is focused on improving literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across the area's primary and secondary schools. Scottish attainment challenge authority plans for 2017-18 will be commissioned this month, and funding decisions will be made following a process of formal review of the plans. In addition, as the Deputy First Minister announced last week, schools in North Ayrshire will directly receive a total of £4,392,000 in 2017-18 through the pupil equity fund.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that those additional resources will give headteachers greater flexibility to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for pupils, especially in some of our most deprived communities?

**Derek Mackay:** I absolutely agree. Some people have criticised the Government for our new departure in giving resources directly to headteachers and schools, but the transformation is very welcome and should help us to address the poverty-related attainment gap.

### **Public Bodies (Debt)**

3. **Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on waiving debt that is owed to it by public bodies in financial crisis. (S5O-00651)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** The Scottish

Government sets out in the Scottish public finance manual the conditions in which lending money is appropriate and the factors that are to be taken into account when it is considering the waiving of debts. The key consideration for the Scottish Government is always the economical, efficient and effective stewardship of taxpayers' money.

**Jenny Marra:** As the cabinet secretary will know, NHS Tayside has said that its debt due to the Scottish Government this year will total £36 million. Is NHS Tayside the only national health service board that is in debt to the Government? If not, does it have the largest debt? What are the implications of waiving the debt, and might his Government consider doing that?

**Derek Mackay:** NHS Tayside, like any public body, has an obligation to live within its means, and we expect the board to take action to do so. There are brokerage arrangements in place and the repayment of brokerage will be agreed over the lifetime of the arrangement on a timeline that provides stability for NHS Tayside and is fair and consistent across the NHS in Scotland.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** NHS Tayside has admitted that it needs to find £214 million in savings over the next five years just to break even. What assurance can the cabinet secretary give my constituents that they will not see any diminution in front-line services as a result of the desperate financial situation that has been allowed to develop in NHS Tayside?

**Derek Mackay:** Murdo Fraser might want to tell his constituents that he voted against more money for the health service, as he was trying to secure tax cuts for the rich and the reintroduction of prescription charges at the same time as this Government was investing in front-line NHS services and enhancing support for social care and for general practitioners and other professionals. As the member would expect, we will engage with NHS Tayside to ensure that it is in a strong position, and we will give the board support to get through this period.

#### Scottish Fiscal Commission

##### 4. **Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):**

To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution last spoke with the Scottish Fiscal Commission. (S5O-00652)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** I held a meeting with Lady Rice, the chair of the Scottish Fiscal Commission, and commissioner Campbell Leith on 9 December 2016, at which the commission presented the findings of its scrutiny of the forecasts that underpin the Scottish Government's draft budget for 2017-18. In addition, I spoke to

Lady Rice by telephone on Friday 27 January this year.

**Monica Lennon:** This week, the Fraser of Allander institute raised concerns about the way in which the so-called additional money that was announced in last week's budget was found in such a short space of time following the publication of the draft budget. The institute also raised some important issues with regard to the overall budget process and options for reform.

The regulations to expand the functions of the Scottish Fiscal Commission are due to come into force in April 2017. What assurances can the cabinet secretary give that Parliament will receive forecasts in sufficient time to ensure that members can provide proper scrutiny of future budget processes?

**Derek Mackay:** I agree that we need to review the processes of the Parliament. That is why I absolutely supported the budget review group. I think that a number of processes are worthy of revision partly because of how the functions of the Parliament have changed—the new powers—and partly because of the timescale for the chancellor's statement. The budget process is undoubtedly complex. I think all members recognise that and that we should all reflect on that together.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission has confirmed to me that the assessments that we have made are reasonable to inform our budget position, and it has not complained to me about a lack of time to do its work. I look forward to the commission moving to its statutory function this year.

I say again that I am embracing the review with an open mind, as I think all members should do, so that we can arrive at a better process for our budget. I am happy to engage with political parties on that.

#### Small Business Bonus Scheme

5. **Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many businesses will receive support from the expansion of the small business bonus scheme. (S5O-00653)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** As I mentioned earlier, more than 100,000 properties will be lifted out of non-domestic rates for 2017-18, due to expansion of the small business bonus scheme.

**Ruth Maguire:** What other policies are in place to give small and medium-sized enterprises a competitive advantage?

**Derek Mackay:** The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work has mentioned the Scottish growth scheme. There is also further advice and support, improved access to finance,

help for exports and support for innovation and entrepreneurship. There is also the prospect of the workforce development fund that Mr Hepburn is taking forward.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** For those not in the small business bonus scheme, times are tough. England and Wales have transitional relief schemes; Scotland had a relief scheme for every previous revaluation. Contrary to what the cabinet secretary just said, it is not just the utilities that are affected. We have heard of nurseries and tourism businesses that are affected and hotels in my constituency that will need to pay off staff. If we bring him examples of where there is a real impact, can I urge the cabinet secretary to consider transitional relief?

**Derek Mackay:** I hate to embarrass Jackie Baillie by pointing out her inaccuracies, but last time there was a revaluation, there was not a transitional rates relief scheme either, because of the assessment of who would be the winners and the losers. [*Interruption.*] Jackie Baillie was not factually correct, but she can keep heckling me if she likes.

Essentially, Jackie Baillie's question was whether, if she brings me further information, I will look at options. Of course I will. I am a very engaging cabinet secretary. I like working with people to find solutions. My solutions nationally include lowering the poundage, expanding small business bonuses, taking more people out of the large business supplement and advising people how to appeal—if that is the appropriate thing to do—reducing the tax take by not insisting on a revenue-neutral revaluation, and supporting local authorities to implement local rates relief schemes, where that is appropriate.

I say to Jackie Baillie and a number of Labour authorities around the country that they should look seriously at the extra resources that local authorities now have—the empowerment and the enablement that exist—and, if it is appropriate to have a further local rates relief scheme, those authorities should implement it, rather than simply carping from the sidelines. They have a responsibility to support businesses, and they should take it, as I have done nationally.

If we had just implemented a national transitional rates relief scheme, it would have meant many people's bills being held artificially high to pay for others, particularly the big utility firms. The Opposition needs to know its facts on this very significant matter.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** The small business bonus scheme is particularly valuable in rural areas, where there are more small and medium sized businesses. What impact

could the rural rates relief have in Dumfries and Galloway?

**Derek Mackay:** As well as the range of reliefs that I have touched on, I wanted to match the rural rates relief that was being offered south of the border, so that we could catch as many as possible and give maximum support. That was the intention of matching rural rates relief with the position south of the border. It puts us in a position where, especially for smaller businesses, we have the most competitive rates relief regime across these islands.

#### **Funding Allocations (Rural Deprivation)**

6. **Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how rural deprivation is taken into account in its funding allocations. (S50-00654)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** The Scottish Government recognises the importance of delivering services for rural areas, which is clearly reflected as a priority in the programme for government. In particular, the indicators that are used for the allocation of funding to national health service boards and local authorities take account of rural deprivation. For example, morbidity and life circumstances are a component of the formula that is used for allocating funding to NHS boards, and that component adjusts for deprivation. It is calculated for small area populations of between 500 and 1,000 residents and is therefore able to identify pockets of deprivation in rural as well as urban areas. The formula also takes account of the higher costs of delivering services in rural and remote areas.

**Richard Lochhead:** I commend the additional focus on tackling poverty and inequalities in Scotland, which have been exacerbated by Tory Government policy, according to the Resolution Foundation report that was published last week. However, the cabinet secretary is aware that rural deprivation can be challenging to identify. There is increased targeting by the Scottish Government with a focus on the data zones in the 15 per cent most deprived areas under the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, but Moray and other areas do not qualify to be in the most deprived 15 per cent. Can I have an assurance that a safety mechanism is in place that identifies rural deprivation? At times, it is difficult to identify and measure, but it must be addressed in the same way as deprivation in other communities.

**Derek Mackay:** I believe that there are such mechanisms and safeguards, such as through the local government finance methodology and through the attainment fund for schools. The coverage of that fund to tackle inequality has reached every local authority in Scotland.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

Audit Scotland has reported that many people in Moray are classified as being deprived in terms of their ability to access services. What is the Scottish Government doing to address that issue?

**Derek Mackay:** It is fair to raise the issue of eligibility. There was a time—before this Administration—when funds were targeted on an area-by-area basis, according to postcode, and only in areas of multiple deprivation, so people could be poor and potentially eligible but live in the wrong areas to get support and access to services. We changed that in many of our funding streams so that more support is targeted based on eligibility—that is, whether the person is less well off and should be entitled to services, rather than whether they live in a certain postcode area. That is a good practical example of how Governments change policy to genuinely target need rather than just taking a data-zone approach. There has to be a balance of targeted interventions and universality where eligibility is taken into account.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The cabinet secretary might consider himself to be engaging, but he failed miserably to engage with any of the four brief points in my supplementary question. I would like to ask your advice. What is the point of supplementary questions in Parliament if the minister simply answers again the question that was lodged?

I remind Derek Mackay that my questions were as follows. Is NHS Tayside's debt to the Scottish Government the largest debt? What are the implications of waiving the debt? Will the Government consider doing that? Is NHS Tayside the only board in Scotland that has such a debt to the Government? If the cabinet secretary cannot answer those questions in Parliament, maybe he will be kind enough to write to me and engage with the points then.

**The Presiding Officer:** That was not a point of order. However, Ms Marra has made her point, and I am sure that she is perfectly capable of lodging written questions or putting questions in a letter to the cabinet secretary, who will consider them.

**Jobcentre Plus Network**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-03873, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on the future of the Jobcentre Plus network.

14:44

**The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. We recently debated proposals from the United Kingdom Department for Work and Pensions to close Jobcentre Plus facilities in Scotland. At the time, I predicted that it would not be long before we would debate such matters again—and here we are.

The proposals for Scotland-wide closures affect communities and people the length and breadth of the country. They are disproportionate in their impact and they have been announced with little detail, after limited consultation and even less engagement with the people who rely on or work in Jobcentre Plus services. Today's debate allows this Parliament to send a loud and clear message about our concerns about the far-reaching implications for people who rely on access to the services of their local jobcentre—in particular, vulnerable customers—and the implications for DWP staff in the locations and offices that are targeted for closure.

On 7 December last year, the closure of half the jobcentres in Glasgow—eight out of 16—was revealed in the press. There was no consultation of, or prior notice given to, the communities that were affected, to the Scottish Government or to this Parliament.

I alluded to the opportunity that Parliament had to debate the Glasgow closures during a members' business debate on 18 January, which my friend Bob Doris brought to the chamber. Voices across the chamber united with the voices of people from outside Parliament to express concern about the impact on people who rely on Glasgow's jobcentre network. Those voices were united in condemnation of the fact that the proposals were not communicated to communities.

Indeed, the UK Government seems not even to know where Glasgow is. When Caroline Nokes MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery, was asked in the House of Commons about the closures in Glasgow, she said:

“the Minister for Employment”—

that is, the UK minister, Damian Hinds—

“was in Musselburgh just two weeks ago”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 30 January 2017; Vol 620, c 671.]

That is just one example of how far removed the UK Government is from communities in Scotland.

If those proposals were not bad enough, on 26 January, again with no consultation, the DWP announced a further raft of closures across the UK and across Scotland. There was no warning, despite my having raised directly with Damian Hinds the failure to provide warnings about the Glasgow proposals when I met him on 19 January. I wrote to Mr Hinds after that meeting. By some miraculous coincidence, today, on the day of this debate, he has replied to my letter. At first glance, what stands out from the letter is that there is not much additional information. There is no commitment to consult on all closures. Particularly disappointing is Mr Hinds’s failure to commit to visiting the communities and people who will be impacted in Scotland, so that he can truly understand their concerns. I continue to urge him to visit those communities.

The proposals that were revealed on 26 January will impact on 16 more sites in other parts of Scotland: nine jobcentres, six back offices and one centre for health and disability assessment. Let me be clear: the proposals could mean closure of another six jobcentres, in Broxburn, Edinburgh city, Inverness, Port Glasgow, Alexandria, and Benbecula.

We have also learned from the press that there is a plan to move Grangemouth jobcentre, which is not on the planned closure list, to Falkirk. That we continue to find out details through the media rather than directly from the UK Government demonstrates the continuing failure to communicate decisions properly.

In Greenock, 28 staff and services will move from the current jobcentre before March 2018. The move is a distance of 2.9 miles. Had the distance been 0.1 of a mile further, a consultation on closure would have been required. It is my view that any proposal for closure should be open to consultation. The UK Government cannot make decisions that are based just on lines or circles on a map, but it seems to be clear that that, to a large extent, is how the decisions about the sites that are to be closed have been made.

I want to highlight my concerns about the plans. Those concerns were voiced by the First Minister in Parliament last week and I have heard them expressed directly by people who will be affected.

The factor that seems to have largely driven the changes is whether lease arrangements for the buildings in which jobcentres are located are coming to an end. That strikes me as an odd way to determine which communities should continue to have jobcentre services. It also seems to be

clear that having to travel further, as many jobcentre service users will have to do, will have the biggest impact on people who are vulnerable, who have health and mobility problems and who have caring commitments. Decisions that are based on lines drawn on maps do not reflect the reality that many people do not own, or have access to, a car. They do not reflect the reality of how communities are connected with one another by public transport. They do not reflect the reality that increased travel costs will be a strain on families who are already under financial pressure.

All of us should make no mistake—the closures have left people worried. At the invitation of Bob Doris and Patrick Grady MP, I visited Maryhill burgh halls earlier this week and heard service users’ worries about the costs of travel, and their worries about having to make hard choices between paying for travel and paying for food. It seems to be inevitable that the additional challenge of accessing more remote jobcentres at appointed times will increase the risk of people being subjected to benefits sanctions. That was a particular concern that I heard in Maryhill and when I visited Parkhead Housing Association last week.

The changes also threaten important and established relationships with work coaches. I know at first hand how dedicated and hard working many DWP staff are. For all our concerns and criticisms of the framework within which they have to work, I know that DWP staff are committed to the people with whom they work. I also know that productive relationships with DWP work coaches are really important to customers with complex or sensitive needs, who get to know and trust the work coach with whom they work. When I met One Parent Families Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland and Home Start in Maryhill this week, they spoke eloquently of the “dehumanising” effect on claimants of having over and over again to share personal stories with strangers.

The closures are rationalised on the assumption that more people now access Jobcentre Plus services online. However, a significant number of clients either do not have the information technology that they need to access the services, or they rely on their local jobcentres for the facilities to undertake computer searches and to apply for jobs online. In many cases, the closure of a jobcentre will make accessing services online more difficult.

The reality is that the DWP’s plans mean not just the closure of jobcentres across Scotland but the closure of back-office facilities as well. The DWP also proposes to close six administrative centres across Scotland. Those are not simply faceless, back-of-house administrative offices; the

facilities employ hard-working, dedicated and committed people who work to ensure that DWP front-line services are effective. The facilities provide a significant number of jobs and make a vital contribution to their local areas. DWP ministers have stated that staff who are impacted by the changes will have the option of moving elsewhere, but that may not be possible in every instance. For example, jobs in Silvan house in Edinburgh could be moved or redeployed to Newcastle by March 2018, and staff in Cumnock will find it difficult to travel elsewhere readily in order to continue employment with the DWP. I have met the Public and Commercial Services Union and I share its concerns about the negative impact that the closures will have on jobcentre staff as well as on service users.

I believe that we should explore all the options to ensure that services continue to exist for those who need them. Joint working between the Scottish Government and the UK Government could better realise that. Our new devolved employability support services should trigger the opportunity to align existing employability support in Scotland with that at UK level, and to drive alignment and shared governance and accountability.

Paragraph 58 of the Smith commission agreement states that

“the UK and Scottish Government will identify ways to further link services through methods such as co-location wherever possible and establish more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland.”

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I will, of course, give way to Mr Tomkins, who will understand the Smith commission agreement very well, given that he was on the commission.

**Adam Tomkins:** I am not solely responsible for having written every word of the Smith commission agreement, but I thank the minister for the compliment.

There is much in the minister’s remarks that I agree with, but I would like to push him a little on whether he has made any particular suggestions—either through the joint ministerial working group on welfare or through any other mechanism of intergovernmental communication—about the location of any specific devolved service in any of the jobcentres or other DWP properties that are cited for closure.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Let me make it clear that I did not mean accepting the intervention to be a compliment to Mr Tomkins, and I am aware that he did not write the entire Smith commission agreement. I hope that that was not him trying to step back from the shared commitment to

paragraph 58 of the Smith commission agreement. *[Interruption.]* I hear him from a sedentary position saying, “Absolutely not.” I very much welcome that.

I recognise that the matter has been laid out in the member’s amendment. I could have accepted much of his amendment, but it is unfortunate that he has sought to alter our wording. We will not accept it because of that. It is clear, as we say in the motion, that the DWP’s proposed changes “will have” a negative impact on service users, but he would rather say that they “may have” a negative impact on service users.

I agree with much of the rest of the tenor of Mr Tomkins’ amendment. He refers to the need to have in place a process of two-way dialogue. I absolutely accept the need for that. All that I can say to Parliament is that, up until now, our side has made the effort, and the dialogue has been one way, with little coming back from the other side.

On Mr Tomkins specific point, I have sought to explore with the UK Government the possibility of how we can undertake a programme of co-location. My officials have done that, too, and Skills Development Scotland has met the DWP to try to see how we can undertake that at specific locations.

To Parliament I say—I would have thought that this point would be self-evident—that it is rather difficult to make a specific proposal about any specific location where a jobcentre might be closed when we do not find out about the specific centres that are going to be closed until a decision has been taken. If we want to engage in the terms of paragraph 58 and have “meaningful dialogue”, it would be better if the DWP were to engage in the process of two-way dialogue that Mr Tomkins has urged should take place and, I am sure, that this entire Parliament would accept is necessary, so that we can see how we can co-locate services to ensure better services for people.

Let me be clear that the process so far around the closures suggests that further progress is needed to make the terms of paragraph 58 of the Smith commission agreement a reality.

The rationale for the decisions that have been taken by the UK Government needs to be better explained, examined and justified. The Scottish Government—and, I believe, this Parliament—should be involved in the planning and the delivery of co-location or outreach services. I hope that I have just made that point clearly to Mr Tomkins. More can—and must—be done to seek alternative accommodation or facilities in locations where jobcentres could close.

I urge the UK Government to share its plans in order to allow the Scottish Government to engage



better and to provide a platform for further discussion on paragraph 58 of the Smith commission agreement. Until it does so, it is incumbent on us to send a clear message to the UK Government—I hope that the entire Parliament will unite this evening behind this message—that until it engages in that process, it should halt its closures process in order to allow us collectively to ensure continued support for our communities. I urge Parliament to back that position.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned at the impact that the announced closure of up to 23 Jobcentre Plus sites across Scotland by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will have on people and communities; recognises the negative outcomes on those who need to access Jobcentre Plus sites that these closures will bring; calls on the DWP to provide more detail on the timing, scope and rationale for these closures, alongside equality impact assessments; believes that the terms of paragraph 58 of the Smith Commission Agreement, which sets out that “the UK and Scottish Government will identify ways to further link services through methods such as co-location wherever possible and establish more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland” should have triggered more meaningful dialogue between the DWP and the Scottish Government on the future of Jobcentre Plus sites in Scotland, and calls on the DWP to halt the closures to allow the Scottish Government to bring forward substantive co-location proposals to save these jobcentres.

14:58

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** From the day that I discovered that the DWP had plans to close a number of jobcentres—initially in Glasgow and then across Scotland more broadly—I articulated my concerns about the proposals, first to the Secretary of State for Scotland, as the minister knows, and latterly in this Parliament and in the press. From the beginning, our priority has been to seek to understand the proposals, not to condemn or to condone them. Our amendment seeks to reflect that position.

It is important to understand the context in which the changes are happening. There are two elements to that. The first is that, in Westminster, there is all-party agreement—that includes the Labour Party and the SNP—that the future of Jobcentre Plus needs to be different from its past. The employment market is changing; the work that jobcentres perform is also changing. For example, it is increasingly important to the work of jobcentres for them to have the facility and the space to act as recruiting hubs for local employers so that employers can seek to hire employees at those jobcentres. That is much easier to do with a smaller number of larger jobcentres than it is with a larger number of smaller jobcentres. It is worth recalling that, in November 2016, the all-party House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee said:

“The future of Jobcentre Plus ... is one of change ... To make a success of its new, expanded role, JCP will have to ensure that it is open to working in ways that are increasingly flexible, adaptable and experimental.”

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** The member rightly talks about having a UK perspective on jobcentre closures, but does he think that Glasgow—the city that he represents—is ready for half of its centres to close, particularly given the level of digital exclusion in Glasgow?

**Adam Tomkins:** I have said before that I think that all eight of the proposed Glasgow jobcentre closures should be put out to public consultation. I have made that point to the secretary of state and in the chamber. Three of the closures have been put out to public consultation, and my view is that all eight of them should have been.

The second aspect of the context in which we must understand the DWP’s proposals is that they come at a time when the jobs market in the UK, including here in Scotland, has changed considerably. There are now more jobs in the British economy than ever before, and there are more than 2.7 million more jobs than there were when Labour was last in office in 2010. Pauline McNeill has just asked me about Glasgow. In Glasgow, the claimant count has fallen by 44 per cent since 2010. In that context, it is surely rational to keep under review the nature and scale of the jobcentre provision that we need.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** Leaving aside the fact that I might have some issues with the statistics that Mr Tomkins used on the fall in the claimant count, does he accept that those who remain unemployed in Glasgow will be among the most marginalised, vulnerable and furthest-away-from-the-labour-market people in the UK, and that those individuals and families need that service at the heart of their communities, not three and a half miles away?

**Adam Tomkins:** I accepted that point when we debated Mr Doris’s motion on 19 January, and I accept it now. I was about to say that, all of that said, as I said in our previous debate on the matter a few weeks ago, even if the nature of the demand and the nature of the work that jobcentres perform are changing, it remains an important consideration that the demand is met locally, where possible. We know that some of our fellow citizens are a long way removed from the jobs market and that it is already enough of a challenge to encourage such people to engage with their work coaches at their local jobcentres. To move jobcentres further away from where those people live may act as a further disincentive to engage and make them even harder to reach. That cannot be in their interests, nor is it in the national interest, which is why I have called for all eight of

the Glasgow jobcentre closure proposals to be put out to public consultation. That would enable us to better understand what is at stake.

If that applies to Jobcentre Plus, surely it also applies to other public services. Since we last spoke about jobcentres in the debate on Mr Doris's motion, I have received notification that no fewer than four police stations across Glasgow are being "reviewed", as Police Scotland put it. I have been told that

"Police Scotland is currently assessing its estate requirements"—

again, we are talking about a proposal that is driven by estate requirements—

"with many of its buildings no longer meeting current operational requirements ... This means we need to consider the viability and suitability of some of our properties."

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The debate is about jobcentre closures, but Mr Tomkins is talking about police stations, which have nothing whatsoever to do with jobcentres.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms White. That was not really a point of order. I have already considered whether Mr Tomkins has moved too far away from his amendment. I understand that he is discussing other closures as an example of centralising before moving back to jobcentres, so I believe that he is within a whisker of his amendment.

**Adam Tomkins:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

As I understand it, Pollokshaws police station might close, as might Saracen police station—which I think is in Bob Doris's constituency—and Easterhouse and Castlemilk police stations. Where are the howls of anguish from the SNP's Glasgow MSPs when it comes to the proposed closure of police offices? Surely what goes for the DWP goes also for Police Scotland.

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

**Adam Tomkins:** Not on this occasion.

It is also important to understand what is not happening with regard to jobcentres. The DWP's proposals are about enhancing services, not cutting them; they are about improving claimant access to more employers. The proposals are for a reduction in floor space only. All staff and services will be relocated and no job losses are planned. Indeed, the number of work coaches in Scotland is going up—between April and September of last year, the DWP hired 122 work coaches in Scotland, notwithstanding the fact that there are fewer claimants than there have been at any point since the 1970s.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I want to pick up on the member's point that there are no planned job losses. I accept and readily concede that I am at an advantage in having received a letter from Damian Hinds today, although I have not seen it that much before Mr Tomkins, but it says very clearly—indeed, it is one of the few things that it is rather clear on—that

"At this stage it is not possible to say how many potential redundancies may be necessary".

**Adam Tomkins:** The minister has been assiduous in sharing with Glasgow MSPs and members of the Social Security Committee correspondence that he has received from UK Government ministers—until today. That letter has not been shared with us before today.

Last month, I visited Partick jobcentre, which is one of the larger jobcentres in Glasgow, and I asked staff and managers there about the DWP's plans. One of the things that is happening in that part of Glasgow is that Anniesland jobcentre is to be closed, with its work being rolled mainly into Partick but partly into Drumchapel. The staff and managers at Partick assured me that their jobcentre had ample capacity to absorb the additional work from Anniesland. They also told me that Anniesland is working at only one third of capacity.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please sit down, Mr Greer.

**Adam Tomkins:** I asked how they knew that, because I knew that the issue of how jobcentre capacity is measured has been challenged in the House of Commons, and they told me, "Well, Anniesland jobcentre is located in a three-storey building, and two storeys of it are closed." Only one third of the building that the taxpayer is renting is being used by the jobcentre—

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is in his last minute.

**Adam Tomkins:** I am in my last two seconds.

The other two thirds of the building are being used by other Government departments. It illustrates the magnitude of what we are talking about, which is about redesigning jobcentres to be more effective instead of cutting services. If we held that in our minds, perhaps we would understand the proposals a bit more clearly.

Finally, as the minister knows, I am all in favour of co-location and linking devolved employability services and the like with Jobcentre Plus; indeed, I want more, not less joined-up working between

the UK Government and the Scottish Government. I also fully accept what he said about two-way streets for communication and having dialogue rather than monologue on this score.

However, the fact is that, as our amendment makes clear, this is a two-way process, and the minister, for all his protestations to the contrary, has been—if I may say so—remarkably reticent in coming forward with concrete proposals as to how either Skills Development Scotland or the proposed new Scottish social security agency could in practice co-locate or link with existing Jobcentre Plus provision. Instead of shouting from the rooftops, a little more maturity might have realised better results.

I move amendment S5M-03873.1, to leave out from “will have” to end and insert:

“may have on people and communities; calls on the DWP to provide more detail on the timing and scope of these closures, alongside equality impact assessments; believes that the terms of paragraph 58 of the Smith Commission Agreement, which sets out that ‘the UK and Scottish Government will identify ways to further link services through methods such as co-location wherever possible and establish more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland’ should have triggered more meaningful dialogue between the DWP and the Scottish Government; recognises that such dialogue is a two-way process, and calls on the Scottish Government to make plain its proposals as to how Skills Development Scotland or the proposed Scottish social security agency could co-locate or otherwise link with the existing Jobcentre Plus network.”

15:07

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The closure of 23 jobcentres that the DWP is pursuing will affect deprived communities across Scotland, from Lanarkshire and Glasgow to the Western Isles and the Highlands. Labour members will support the Government motion, because we agree that the closures must be halted and because the UK and Scottish Governments must find a way forward.

Since December, Glasgow Labour has worked hand in hand with its SNP counterparts to fight the proposals. Eight jobcentres in Glasgow—half the number in the city—are up for closure, and the parties have been working together for the sake of people who are desperately looking to exercise their right to work and who need their jobcentre’s support to do that.

Now that the same challenge is extending across the country, I hope that all parties and all party leaders will join the call today for the DWP to halt the closures. Ruth Davidson must break her silence on the closure of the jobcentre in her Edinburgh constituency and on the massive impact that the closures will have on the Glasgow region, which she vacated, and on wider Scotland.

At a time when the Tories are cutting social security and hitting low-paid workers with sanctions, and when 139,000 people in Scotland are out of work, the proposals are reckless at best and utterly perverse at worst. It is completely counterproductive for the UK Government to close so many jobcentres.

The Tory spin that is used to justify the Glasgow cuts is shocking and masks the true harm that the closures will inflict on Scotland’s communities. The claimant count in the city is down by 44 per cent, as the Tories pointed out last month and have pointed out again today, but they choose to overlook the fact that the count across Scotland remains 14 per cent higher than it was before the financial crash. In fact, the number of economically inactive people who would still like a job stands at 190,000, which is 5 per cent higher than the figure before the crash.

The claimant count does not give the whole picture. As the Public and Commercial Services Union has pointed out, the effect of welfare reform is that too many people are falling between the cracks. Digitalisation, sanctions and mandatory reconsideration mean that fewer people are claiming the entitlements that they deserve.

It is astonishing that £2 billion in social security payments goes unclaimed in Scotland each year. Jobseekers allowance and employment and support allowance make up almost £600 million of that. Given the difficulty that people face in just making a claim, that number will keep increasing unless the closures are halted.

One Parent Families Scotland and Inclusion Scotland have stressed the fears that lone parents and disabled people have because of the closures. They fear increased travel times, which will risk lateness and the threat of sanctions; £4.50 bus tickets, which are unaffordable, or having to get taxis for longer journeys; and dealing with childcare arrangements. All that is added to the stress of meeting DWP demands in order to avoid sanctions.

PCS has highlighted the value of the local labour market knowledge that is set to be lost at Easterhouse jobcentre. In such a deprived area, staff knowledge of local employers means that employment support is provided that helps people to find local, accessible work rather than work that is several bus journeys away.

**Adam Tomkins:** There are 713 jobcentres in Great Britain. I want to ensure that I have understood the Labour Party’s position. Is that position that there are no circumstances at all in which any of those 713 jobcentres could ever be closed or merged?

**Mark Griffin:** If the Conservative Government invested in public services and got people into

work, and if we had a zero unemployment rate, maybe there would be a case for closing jobcentres but, when the claimant count and the unemployment rate are still higher than they were before the crash, there is no justification for making the closures.

It is ironic that the closures will have a wider impact on local communities and job markets. The jobcentres are anchor offices in communities. When they are pulled from communities, so too is the passing trade and the service jobs that keep people fed at lunch time, bus networks running and offices cleaned. It is not just the people who rely on support from the jobcentres who will be affected; there will be wider job losses, too. At the same time, critical support networks from organisations such as Citizens Advice Scotland will be abandoned.

The Tories have said that no jobs will be lost in Scotland, but we have heard different news from the minister from the letter to the Scottish Government. I have already been contacted by constituents; non-mobile staff have contacted me to say that they are to have belated consultation and one-to-one interviews to discuss their position before April as a result of the proposals.

In a shocking display of honesty, Annie Wells has said on the record that she can neither condemn nor condone the closures. That sentiment was articulated again by Mr Tomkins today. Ruth Davidson remains in hiding, even though the issue affects her constituency. Given that communities throughout Scotland will be affected by the closures, that is simply not good enough. Ruth Davidson's Tories need to stop trying to rebuild the economy off the backs of the poor, the sick and disabled people, and to call on the DWP to halt the plans.

The motion recalls the Smith commission agreement, which said that more should be done to devolve formal governance over the network and to explore the options for co-location. The triggering of that dialogue should have happened well before the closures of the Glasgow offices were announced. The UK Government must halt the closure plans and work with the Scottish Government to deliver co-location. With new powers over employability schemes coming to the Parliament, ministers must explore those co-location opportunities.

Labour members expect services to be free of the punitive sanctions regime and the misery that sanctions create, but we also expect services that provide high-quality and responsive local employment support to get people into the work that they want and cut through the worst effects of Tory austerity, in order to tackle poverty in Scotland. Delivering dignity and respect in those schemes does not rely solely on jobcentres, but

finding ways to protect them and halt the closures would certainly contribute to that ambition.

15:14

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** On Monday, Patrick Grady MP and I met single parents who will be impacted by the jobcentre closure in Maryhill. I thank the Minister for Employability and Training, Jamie Hepburn, for listening to those people's concerns during his visit to Maryhill burgh halls. They had concerns about matters such as how on earth they would get to the jobcentre in Springburn, which is a four-bus round trip away and, for some, potentially a two and a half hour journey, even though they have caring commitments. They are also concerned about the cost of public transport to get to Springburn, because a £4.50 day ticket is a huge chunk out of a weekly benefit of £70 or so.

Claimants are concerned about losing the relationship that they have developed with their Jobcentre Plus job coach, because that relationship is not guaranteed to continue under the proposed changes, no matter what Jobcentre Plus has told us. It has told us that staff have the option of transferring to a jobcentre that is closer to where they stay, if they wish, so it is wrong about the job coaches.

People have not just concerns but fear about the risk of sanctions should their family and caring commitments be inconsistent with attending changed appointment times and having longer journey times. People have had sleepless nights because of the impact that the changes will have not on them but on their children and families—that is their primary concern.

Despite all that, the Tories in the debate today have, unfortunately, sought to water down the Scottish Parliament's position of opposition to the jobcentre closures. The Tories cannot even bring themselves to talk about the impact that the motion states that the closures "will have"; their amendment would change the words to "may have". That shows that they are paying only sad and pathetic lip service to doing something about the closures for those who will—not "may"—be impacted. The worry that the proposed closures are causing is already having an impact, and I met people on Monday who are being impacted.

I believe that the Tories wish to do more than just pay lip service to doing something about the closures, but it is increasingly clear that the Tory line on Jobcentre Plus has been developed not in Scotland but by the UK Tory Government. It is time for the Tories to stand up for their constituents and not for the Conservatives.

I will say a bit about equality impact assessments or, rather, the lack of them. Some

basic information is needed before anyone can conduct an equality impact assessment, such as information on the catchment area that a jobcentre covers, but that information does not exist. To conduct an EIA, we would need to know the number of claimants who use the jobcentre, but Jobcentre Plus is a bit hazy about that. In fact, it is worse than hazy about it; Patrick Grady MP and I were told during a visit to the jobcentre in Maryhill that Jobcentre Plus does not collect that information. That is right—Jobcentre Plus does not collect that information, which is ridiculous.

If anyone wants to know why there should have been equality impact assessments, they should look at the Inclusion Scotland briefing that was prepared for this debate and for my members' business debate the other week. I will not reiterate what that briefing says, but it is vital that no decisions on closures are made until a full and genuine equality impact assessment has been conducted for all Jobcentre Plus sites.

The Inclusion Scotland briefing provides a case study that I am sure is pertinent to not only the jobcentre in my constituency but those in the constituencies of MSPs across the chamber. The briefing states:

“One client told Jobcentre Plus that he did not have the money to get there for an appointment, they advised him to walk, but he explained that his poor health meant that he was unable to walk the long distance. He received a 13-week sanction for failing to attend.”

Those are not my words; they report the situation of someone who is living the life of a benefits claimant who struggles to survive. We can imagine the impact on physical and mental health that many vulnerable claimants face right now.

I want to be optimistic about something, because we can get opportunity from a crisis. I did not realise beforehand that the relationship between the job or work coaches and claimants is often, if not always, positive. However, as I said, the link between job coaches and claimants is not guaranteed to continue. Claimants sometimes have good relationships not only with job coaches but with One Parent Families Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland and Home-Start, which act as positive intermediaries that support the vulnerable individuals who should be at the heart of all this. Those relationships are positive and local. Clients can drop into the jobcentre in Maryhill outside required times to use the IT facilities for job searches, and support is provided for that. Those people will not go to Springburn and there are no other appropriate support facilities in the local area, which is just not on.

I will say a bit about co-location. Mr Tomkins tried to compare the co-location options of Jobcentre Plus and Scottish public agencies with police estate rationalisation. I got the same email

as he did from Chief Inspector Ross Allan at Maryhill police station. On 24 January, the chief inspector told me:

“efforts are underway to identify suitable front counter facilities in a shared facility in the local community to complement the other existing sub-division police offices at Maryhill and Baird Street”.

In other words, officers from Police Scotland are saying to MSPs in their communities, “We are not leaving the communities; let's identify co-location options,” whereas Jobcentre Plus is saying, “We are out of here—good luck with your benefits claimants.” That is very different, so Mr Tomkins should not mislead the Parliament about what Police Scotland is doing—that is very unbecoming of an MSP who says that he is trying to defend vulnerable people in Glasgow.

I will talk a bit more about co-location.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Bob Doris:** If I have time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No—you are in your last minute.

**Bob Doris:** As a community, Maryhill is ripe for co-location. I have listed some of the organisations in Maryhill, such as Citizens Advice Scotland on Avenuepark Street and Home-Start just down the road, One Parent Families Scotland, Jobs and Business Glasgow, Cube Housing Association, Glasgow Housing Association and Maryhill Housing Association, and there are two nearby branches of Skills Development Scotland. As Maryhill jobcentre celebrates its 75th anniversary, we could do something really special on co-location to meet the needs of the vulnerable constituents who I represent, as we all represent vulnerable constituents across Scotland. However, we should not be doing things in the current way; we should give the great ideas breathing space to develop. We have to halt all the closures and think again.

15:21

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I understand the concerns that have been raised here today and at the members' business debate on 19 January in which I spoke. During that debate, I was open about my concerns about how the proposals were communicated and about the speed with which the consultation took place. I was open about the concern that I had about the consultation being restricted to just three jobcentres—Bridgeton, Maryhill and Castlemilk, as Adam Tomkins said—and I made it clear that services need to be made as accessible as possible for everyone. I reiterated those concerns in my response to the DWP's public consultation.

Although I stated that it was right to review the future of the jobcentres in the light of the 20-year lease contract coming to an end next year and statistics revealing a 20 to 40 per cent underoccupancy rate, I did not believe that it was right to steamroller ahead with blanket closures without fully considering the responses that were submitted.

I stated that, in the event of any closures, we could not find ourselves in a situation in which those with disabilities, long-term illnesses or a severe lack of funds were found to be disadvantaged by increased journey times. If closures did take place, provision within a clearly defined system would need to be made and communicated in a way that was clear to all and could include a programme of tailored outreach, such as home visits, online applications and—for those not able to access the internet—applications by post.

I echo the concerns of other members regarding the need for the DWP to provide more detail on the issue, particularly now that the consultation is closed, and I am pleased that such a request has been retained in my colleague's amendment.

Communication is key and, at the moment, we are not having a meaningful dialogue about the alternatives that might need to be put in place.

**Pauline McNeill:** Will the member give way?

**Annie Wells:** Not at the moment; I want to make progress.

We need a dialogue about alternatives that could provide as good a service as we have now. Ideas were put forward in the consultation template itself that could go a long way towards solving the issue and reaching a compromise that disadvantages no one. For example, there was the idea of an alternative service that involves the Jobcentre Plus staff travelling to community venues to carry out their work. Why not consider that?

**Sandra White:** We did an investigation and went to Musselburgh jobcentre, which has an outreach service. One issue that was raised concerned someone who turned up at the outreach service at the library with a sick line, thinking that they could hand it to the person from Jobcentre Plus, but they were told that they had to go to the jobcentre to hand it in there. Surely that is very wrong. How do we get over that?

**Annie Wells:** We need a dialogue about that. It is a two-way process and we need to ensure that we look at solutions, not problems. That is what I am trying to put forward.

In its response to the consultation, the Poverty Alliance stated that despite its wish for centres to remain open, the suggested idea might be an

alternative option. The obvious concern was to ensure that service users had access to an environment in which they felt safe and felt that they could speak privately without their concerns being heard. It also stated that one adviser alone would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the community. However, there is no reason why those concerns could not be properly addressed in providing a full outreach service that could protect the most vulnerable and those with childcare responsibilities.

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Annie Wells:** Sorry, but I want to move on.

Even now, in circumstances in which people feel sufficiently vulnerable, members of the Jobcentre Plus network already visit them in their homes. Could we not expand on that?

In a debate on 30 January, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Welfare Delivery, Caroline Nokes, was open to the suggestion of using satellite visits on commercial premises, which would be run by job organisations and at which workplace coaches could coach a number of people together. If we are looking at actually making the services better, we should look at more creative ways of working, and I would point to the substantial powers that the Scottish Government now has over employment services.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Ms Wells makes a number of innovative and sensible suggestions about how we could better provide Jobcentre Plus services in the community. She and Adam Tomkins referred to the process of two-way dialogue, and Mr Tomkins was at pains to point out that both he and Ms Wells had communicated their concerns to the UK Government. What response to her innovative suggestions has Ms Wells had from the UK Government?

**Annie Wells:** As I was saying, the parliamentary under-secretary said during the debate on 30 January that she would be open to those suggestions.

**Jamie Hepburn:** That will be no reply, then.

**Annie Wells:** Pardon?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Do not have discussions across the chamber, if you do not mind.

**Annie Wells:** I appreciate that the minister has opened the door to discussions between Skills Development Scotland and the DWP, but we need more information on how that will work.

There has been no mention by the DWP of it making cuts to investment. As I said in my speech in the previous debate on this subject, last year more than 122 additional work coaches were

recruited by Jobcentre Plus in Scotland to ease workload and to provide a service that is based more on rapport.

I ask members to reflect on something that my colleague Adam Tomkins mentioned. I recognise that police offices and jobcentres are two very different services, but they are both used by people who are vulnerable—no one can deny that.

I am running out of time.

I recognise that the UK Government needs to provide more information on the timing and scope of the closures and I am pleased that we have asked for that in our amendment, alongside highlighting the need for equality impact assessments.

15:27

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Some would call the closure of the jobcentres decimation, but it is worse than that; “decimation” means culling one in 10, and in Glasgow we will experience a cull of one in two jobcentres in the next year.

The reduction in the number of jobcentres will mean that many people will need, for a host of reasons, to take transport to alternative jobcentres. In her feedback to One Parent Families Scotland, a jobseeker said:

“The cost is going to be a big issue—£4.50 for an all-day ticket. From an income of £73.10 week it’s a lot—like losing food shopping for a day”.

I am sure that policy makers do not see the problem in needing to spend £4.50 on transport once a week, but the people who are affected, in some of the poorest parts of the UK, will definitely suffer because of the closures. One in three children in Glasgow is living in poverty. The affected communities are communities with real issues, where child poverty is high and where £4.50 for an all-day bus ticket is just too much money to spend on transport rather than on eating.

In the area of Newton Farm, in my constituency, the current walk to Cambuslang jobcentre takes 37 minutes—and that is one way. Cambuslang jobcentre is due to close, and the walk to the next jobcentre, in Rutherglen, takes 1 hour and 19 minutes. Assuming that someone is fit and healthy, that means that what was once an hour-and-a-quarter round trip will now take two and half hours. I have not tried the walk; I have just been using the Westminster Government’s tool of choice—Google Maps—to check the results. The results are strange given that Google Maps is the tool that was consulted to ensure that no trip to a jobcentre would take that long. Simply assuming that people can pay the bus or taxi fare, or can just

walk to the next jobcentre, shows how removed from reality the policy makers in Westminster are.

The lack of consultation or impact assessment on many of the closures shows wilful ignorance of just how they will impact the lives of ordinary people. The policies do not take account of people’s responsibilities as caregivers, their own ill health or any individual circumstances whatsoever. They are focused purely on cutting numbers, cutting services and cutting investment in people, particularly the people of Glasgow.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will the member identify one service that is being cut in Glasgow? I understand that premises are being closed, but can she identify even a single jobcentre service that is being cut, which is what she just said?

**Clare Haughey:** I believe that this is just the thin end of the wedge

We need a social security system that works for Scotland, not for the establishment at Westminster. We need to invest in people and treat them with dignity, and understand that the overwhelming majority of people want to be working. The continual turning of the screw, with sanctions, daily signing on and the slashing of jobcentres, is simply Westminster setting up more hoops for people to jump through.

As was laid out in the Scottish Government’s employability support consultation, Scotland needs a system that takes into account everyone’s individual circumstances. Avoiding sanctions should not be the biggest concern for a jobseeker and neither should worries about how they will manage a 2.5-hour round trip to sign on. Personal action plans should take into consideration circumstances such as whether people are a parent or a caregiver or have physical or mental health issues.

The aim should be not merely to get someone into a job—any job—just to get them off the books and keep the numbers down. Jobcentre provision should help people to build careers—real jobs with real personal and economic development—not put them back on a zero-hours merry-go-round that will see them back at the jobcentre and receiving treatment for stress. The DWP should be looking to support people to build sustainable careers and communities that do not have some of the highest child poverty rates in Scotland, thanks in part to sanctions on mothers who are already on the breadline.

The number of jobcentres in Scotland has already fallen from 117 in 2008 to 104 today, and now we are going to see a further cut of 23 sites. The centres are being closed without the affected local communities being consulted. There has been no consultation over the closure of Cambuslang jobcentre, despite some areas it

serves being a minimum 80-minute walk from Rutherglen jobcentre, running counter to the DWP's consultation criterion of being within a reasonable travel distance. If the DWP will not consult the community, it needs to consult the Scottish Government on the best way to structure the jobcentre network to support the most vulnerable.

I call on the UK Government at Westminster to halt the closures and to work with the Scottish Government. As was agreed in the Smith commission, the UK Government is supposed to be committed to working with the Scottish Government to create

"more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland."

Now is the time for Westminster to honour the Smith commission, as we desperately need to find a solution that suits the many unique conditions here in Scotland, especially in Glasgow.

15:33

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The latest wave of closures includes the Alexandria jobcentre in my constituency. I first heard about the proposal two weeks ago when I received an email at 1 pm inviting me to meet Damian Hinds, the Minister of State for Employment, at 4 pm on the same day in London—clearly, geography is not the minister's strong point.

Damian Hinds also said that staff and service users in Alexandria would be moved to the jobcentre in Dumbarton. I was told not to worry, because the two sites are "just 3 miles" apart. However, I have checked and the actual distance is 3.5 miles. This is not nitpicking; it is important because the DWP has agreed to launch full public consultation on jobcentre closures only where the distance between the two sites is more than 3 miles, so I want a consultation on the closure of Alexandria jobcentre. Either the DWP has simply not bothered to work out how far it is forcing staff and claimants to travel, or it knows the actual distance but wants to avoid proper scrutiny of its plans.

Like the round of closures in Glasgow that were announced at the end of last year, the DWP's handling of the Alexandria closure has been wholly unsatisfactory. There was no consultation with jobcentre staff before the announcement; there was no information provided on the number of claimants who would be affected by the closure; and there was no equality impact assessment to examine the impact on some of the most marginalised groups in my constituency.

Let us be honest about the reasons behind the closures. Decisions on which jobcentres to close and the timing of the announcements have been

determined by the fact that the leases on the buildings are coming to an end. This is about properties and saving money. The last thing that it is about is the needs of jobseekers and local communities. I would be interested to know whether the DWP's reluctance to engage properly with the people who will be affected by the closures is down to the fact that it is in a rush to hand in its notice to the landlords. The local branch of PCS makes the point that, at a time when the DWP is requiring benefit claimants to engage more frequently in face-to-face interviews in jobcentres, it should be opening more of them, not closing the ones that we have.

Closing the Alexandria jobcentre would, without a doubt, make it even harder for people in the Vale of Leven to find work. It makes a complete mockery of Theresa May's pledge at the Tory conference to lead a Government that cares about ordinary working people.

**Bob Doris:** As someone who had to sign on at Alexandria jobcentre in years gone by, I can say that that journey to Dumbarton is not only impractical but unrealistic, and that the closure would be devastating to the attempts to regenerate Alexandria town centre.

**Jackie Baillie:** I could not agree more, because the closure will hit some of the poorest families in the Vale of Leven with extra travel costs and fewer opportunities to find a job.

Across the country, we are facing a joblessness crisis, with 139,000 Scots out of work and rising numbers of people who are economically inactive, many of whom want to find work. If we look at the caseload statistics that were produced by the DWP for May 2016, we see that, in the communities that are served by the jobcentre—Alexandria, Renton and Tullichewan—approximately 60 per cent more people than the Scottish average are in receipt of the five key benefits. This is clearly an area with high levels of service demand, and it makes no sense to close the jobcentre.

Scotland's economy is lagging behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom. There is less employment and more unemployment. Whether we consider my local argument or a national one, we can see that shutting down Alexandria jobcentre and vast swathes of the jobcentre network is completely wrong-headed. Where, then, is the condemnation from Ruth Davidson? I think that I can safely say that she is not shy by nature. However, I do not know whether she is representing the Tory party at Westminster or people in Scotland. The closures will affect her constituents, too, and she owes it to them at least to demand a halt.



Tory ministers used to tell unemployed people to get on their bike to find a job. In Alexandria, unemployed people might not have a choice to do anything other than that, because the public transport links to Dumbarton are unreliable. The transport minister will be aware of frequent station skipping on ScotRail services in my area, and the buses are not much better, with services often being cancelled without notice. Once the DWP has finally worked out the actual distance between Dumbarton and Alexandria, I would urge its representatives to actually try making the journey themselves. I invite the minister to come up and do it. It is one thing to look at Google Maps and another thing to stand waiting for a bus or train that never turns up.

The closure will have real consequences for unemployed and disabled people in Alexandria who miss appointments or arrive late through no fault of their own. Sanctions will increase and local families will suffer.

What about the cost of travel? Someone who is on a fixed low income might sometimes not have the funds to pay for travel. The DWP will apparently pay for travel, but only for attendance above the fortnightly signing appointment. A train ticket for a return journey from Alexandria to Dumbarton is £3.60. On a low income, that is a lot of money.

The DWP talks about co-location with council services. In Alexandria, there is an effective partnership between the council's Working 4 U service and the jobcentre, but the council was not consulted in advance of the closure announcement. The closure of the jobcentre will mean that we will miss the opportunity for joined-up employability services and lose a gateway to learning and money advice and a way of getting people into jobs—all of that will be undermined.

Alexandria is not simply an add-on to Dumbarton; it is a community in its own right. There is a clear need for the jobcentre and I ask the UK Government to think again.

15:39

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I am glad to take part in the debate because, for me, it is very personal. I feel that my town—my place of birth—is under attack from an uncaring right-wing Tory Government. The UK Government in Westminster believes that Paisley does not need the 300 jobs that come with the Lonend DWP office. There is no thinking about the economic future of our town when the heartless Westminster Government decides that it is time to get rid of that valuable facility. Those are 300 jobs at a DWP office that is part of a back-of-house support mechanism that many of our citizens really need at this time.

A number of parts of the decision do not make sense. One of them is the secretive way in which the closure was announced. On the morning of the announcement, staff at the Lonend office received an email telling them that they were doing a fantastic job and that the management were happy. A couple of hours later, they were told that there would be a meeting in the early afternoon. Staff turned up at the meeting with concerns, as they were well aware of the sweeping cuts that the DWP was making. At the meeting, they were once again told what a wonderful job they were doing—and that the office was closing. One minute they were told how well they were doing; the next minute they were told that the office was closing.

I have yet to receive any official correspondence from the UK Government on the matter. Paisley's MSP has not been told of the closure of a major Government facility within his constituency. We often hear from members on the Opposition benches that there should be respect between the UK Government and the Scottish Government. At times like this, there seldom appears to be that respect.

During last week's meeting of the Social Security Committee, Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Employability and Training, explained to us that he first heard about the closure in the pages of the *Daily Record*. It is bad enough that the Tory Government has no respect for local parliamentarians, but for it to ignore a Scottish Government minister is shocking and shows the contempt with which it treats this institution.

One of the other issues that I have with this ill-thought-out closure scheme is the fact that a support mechanism is being taken away from our communities. The universal credit experiment appears to have been an unmitigated disaster for the UK Government. As a member of the Social Security Committee, I visited people in Musselburgh to see how that Tory experiment has gone—the Tories believe it to be a pilot programme. The quickest time for a claimant to receive any form of payment is eight weeks, if they are lucky. By that time, they will have accrued rent arrears and some of them will have chosen to pay for their broadband service over paying for food and heat, because that is the only way that they can communicate with the DWP. They can go to their local jobcentre to try and progress their claim, but the staff have not received the necessary training—they have been told to point people towards a computer in the jobcentre. Not only are people suffering from this Tory ideal but any form of human contact in the process is now being taken away, with no jobcentre and no telephone centre to provide any form of advice.

We have all seen the financial devastation that the Tory sanctions scheme has brought to our

communities. I have had conversations with constituents who have been sanctioned for being minutes late. What it will be like when there are no local jobcentres to attend?

We need to ask ourselves how the closures will affect members of our communities who live with disabilities. We are aware that the Tory Government is already attacking people with a disability in Scotland, but we now find that they will have another barrier, which Mark Griffin mentioned. How will a disabled person get to the jobcentre? They might already have lost their disability living allowance or personal independence payment, or at least the mobility component of it, so they will need to get a bus. The journey could be anywhere between 3 and 6 miles, which may prove challenging.

As Inclusion Scotland states in its very interesting briefing for the debate, not all the disabled people affected will be able to travel by public transport. Some wheelchair users may not be able to find an accessible bus on which to make the journey. Even where buses are accessible, two wheelchair users cannot travel on the same route at the same time, although such an occurrence will become more likely when the services are concentrated in fewer locations.

Once again, no thought has been given to people with a disability—but should we not just expect that from this lot in Westminster?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think I have already said that I do not like the phrase “this lot”. Keep to what I have said to other people.

**George Adam:** Well, Presiding Officer, I get very passionate when people are being attacked by the Tory Government—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You can be passionate and polite, Mr Adam.

**George Adam:** I return to the subject of the DWP office in Paisley and the loss of 300 jobs in our town. How can the Tory Government justify the closure of that office when the staff were told what a good job they were doing and the call centre was promised that it would receive calls about universal credit when the scheme was rolled out? As I know from my interaction with people in Musselburgh, that is exactly the type of facility that is needed.

The UK Government claims that people use different channels of digital communication. In Musselburgh, I met one gentleman whose form of digital communication was a large mobile telephone; that is not the best way to complete a complex form. The whole process is a sham and should be thought through again.

It is time for the UK Government to address this shambles—it cannot withdraw that valuable

support from the people in our community. In 1987, I joined the SNP to protect my community from an uncaring, right-wing Tory Government. The world has changed, but unfortunately the Tories have not. They are happy to sacrifice the people in my community for their ideals, but the one thing that they will not stop is my love for my town and the people I represent. As long as I have a breath in my body, I will continue to fight to protect my community from the on-going, heartless attacks from this Tory Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much, Mr Adam—and there was passion.

15:46

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** The strength of feeling that is associated with this debate—which we have just heard from our colleague George Adam—exemplifies the work that jobcentres do in communities. They assist people who are in need of help, and it is crucially important that we recognise the good efforts of hard-working staff up and down the country. That should not be lost in the rhetoric that so often surrounds issues that are debated in the chamber. It is also important that we remember the context in which the consideration of jobcentre closures has arisen: the natural end of the contracts that the DWP has in place for many of its offices.

**George Adam:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** I will not at this stage.

That natural end provides an opportunity to assess the overall provision of services and to look at where and how those are best delivered in the modern internet world of the 21st century. That reassessment, of course, merits the most careful scrutiny. As a member of the Social Security Committee, I, along with other members of the committee, have had the opportunity to raise issues with representatives from the DWP. It is encouraging that, following our committee meeting on 15 December last year, the DWP responded to concerns that I and other committee members expressed by lengthening the existing consultation period for jobcentre closures in Glasgow.

The Government motion that is before us today comes a long time after, and exists in a very different context from, the original opening in 1998 of many of the offices that are under discussion. We are now firmly entrenched in a digital age—

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** The member may be aware that I wrote to Ruth Davidson on jobcentre closures and asked her to stand up for her constituents over a specific closure in Edinburgh. She wrote back to me, but I have to say that I was not overly comforted by the

contents of that letter. Now is surely the time for Conservative members to stop simply accepting plans that look really good from an office in Whitehall and instead stand up for their constituents, given the reality on the ground, and join with us in opposing the closures.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** The Conservatives will indeed stand up for their constituents, but not simply by carrying on regardless of the realities of the situation.

I return to what I was saying previously to explain my position on the matter. We are not in 1998 now. We are firmly entrenched in a digital age that has followed a complete revolution driven by the internet. We cannot ignore computer literacy—

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** I will not at this stage.

We cannot ignore computer literacy as an essential tool for Scotland's workforce, and that applies equally to the services that the DWP provides.

Eighty per cent of—

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** No.

Eighty per cent of claims for jobseekers allowance and 99.6 per cent of applications for universal credit are made online. Moving services online can help to provide a more efficient service. It can also provide claimants with an opportunity to interact using skills and practices that are needed to survive in the modern workforce—

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** No.

That is provided, of course, that that is backed up by sufficient support. A direct consequence of that high use of online services is the underutilisation of face-to-face services that require physical office space.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** No.

With over 3 million square feet of space going unused in current offices, a review of the DWP estate is an absolute necessity. Co-location—which I am pleased to hear that the minister is interested in—may be an option, with the chance for additional services, such as health and other

public services, to be provided within the same building.

As reflected in the Scottish Conservative amendment, which I support, the Scottish Government should consider how Skills Development Scotland, or indeed the Scottish social security agency, could link up services.

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** No, not at this stage.

However, as my colleague Adam Tomkins pointed out, we need specific proposals—the minister was unable to name any—to put to the UK Government to develop co-location—

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gordon Lindhurst:** I will allow an intervention from the minister.

**Jamie Hepburn:** That is remarkably generous. Surely Mr Lindhurst would concede that it is rather difficult to come up with specific propositions for specific areas when the UK Government does not let us know in which areas it is considering closing a jobcentre.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** I have not seen the terms of the letter from which a partial quotation was given earlier, so I cannot comment on what stage the discussions between the minister and the UK Government have reached.

There are a few matters that need to be borne in mind, including flexibility and the use of work coaches. I am running out of time due to the number of interventions—taken and not taken.

I hope that the Scottish Government will work constructively with the DWP in trying to make this a reality. There are many things from the UK Government to welcome, such as the 2,500 new work coaches, because it is people who matter, and not so much the buildings. People are not made for buildings; buildings are made for people.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** That was quite a finish, Mr Lindhurst.

15:52

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Before I start, I have to say that every Conservative speech so far in the debate has been an absolute disgrace. The Conservatives have hidden behind smoke-and-mirrors technical language: they have talked the debate out. Not one of them has been willing to say that if Annie Wells's grand aspirations for DWP extra provisions are not met, they will stand with us and actually oppose the jobcentre cuts. It is cowardly—cowardly, I repeat—behaviour.

What the Tories have done to jobseekers and others who rely on our social security system is nothing short of despicable. Jobcentres are meant to be institutions to help people—to help them into work, to access training—[*Interruption.*]

If Mr Tomkins wants to say something, he should stand up and I will reject him, just as every Conservative member so far has rejected me.

Jobcentres are supposed to help people to start their own businesses and to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. The Conservatives at Westminster—aided, I have to say, by the Liberal Democrats from 2010 to 2015—have bastardised that concept. They have turned an institution that was designed to help people into an environment of hostility, mistrust and threats. The sanctions that are handed out to people who are looking for work are a stain on the reputation of the UK and they are devastating for the individuals and the families who are victims of them.

The reasons behind the sanctions are often completely ridiculous. A man was sanctioned for missing an appointment because he was taking his wife to hospital when she went into labour prematurely. A person was unable to attend their workfare placement because the transport was too expensive—of course, in the workfare programme, people are not paid—despite that person having offered to work at a branch that was closer to them. A mother of two was sanctioned for a month for being five minutes late to an appointment at the jobcentre. Many, many more examples have appeared across newspapers and broadcast media, in our inboxes and at our surgeries over recent months and years.

The Tories have created a system that is designed to block access to the support to which people are entitled, and to make their lives harder when they are most in need of support.

There is even evidence to suggest that jobcentres were directed to increase intentionally the number of sanctions. We do not need to watch Ken Loach's new film "I, Daniel Blake" to know that—although I suggest that every member of this Parliament, and especially our Conservative colleagues, watch that devastatingly realistic story of life inside the UK welfare system.

Sanctions have a real, human impact. The number of people who have been sanctioned who have died prematurely, including suicides, is far too high. Although numbers are hard to come by, from what we could find, from 2012 to 2014, 90 people a month were dying after having been found "fit to work", and the number was far higher when people in the work-related activity group were added.

According to the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities, the sanctions regime has

constituted a systematic violation of human rights. The Conservatives are responsible for that, and Conservative Party members in this Parliament have been unable or unwilling either to defend or condemn that. I am thankful, however, that we in this Parliament will no longer be completely powerless to act. As new social security powers are being devolved, we will be able to restrict the number of sanctions that are issued in Scotland. Work by my Green colleague Alison Johnstone has established that we can use the powers over the work programme simply to prevent information that would lead to sanctions from being passed on. That will save thousands of people in Scotland from that suffering.

However, for the Tories, the chaos of their welfare policy is apparently not enough—now they want to make people's lives even harder by closing down jobcentres, which will make access to them even more difficult. I ask members to recall some of the reasons for sanctions that I mentioned, including a person being late and a person not being able to afford travel costs. As jobcentres are closed across Scotland, it will be more difficult for claimants to get to appointments on time and to carry the costs of transport. People who are already struggling to get by will find it even harder.

Some of the proposed closures are truly shocking. Either the implications have not been considered or they have been considered and the UK Government knows exactly what the consequences will be but is deciding to proceed anyway.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** There has been a lot of talk of co-location this afternoon. Does Ross Greer share my concern about the idea that someone would go to one desk in a building to be sanctioned, only to be passed to the next desk to access the Scottish welfare fund? Does he agree that that would be perverse and that it would let the DWP off the hook on the issue of sanctions?

**Ross Greer:** Absolutely. Clare Adamson has made an important point.

If the Alexandria jobcentre in my region is closed, the nearest jobcentre will be in Dumbarton, which, as Jackie Baillie mentioned, is an hour's walk by the most direct route. For service users in areas like Haldane, it is even further. It is a scenic walk, mind you, given that it involves travelling through a field. I invited the UK Cabinet minister Damian Hinds to join me on that walk. Jackie Baillie has suggested that, too, but I have already sent him the invitation and I await his reply. I am sure that Jackie Baillie would be happy to join in, but I have a feeling that it might just be the two of us.

Last month, the Scottish Greens organised a walk in Glasgow from Bridgeton jobcentre to Shettleston jobcentre. Again, that is about an hour's walk, or a journey involving two buses, for people who are able to afford public transport. On that walk, Green activists spoke to a number of constituents, all of whom were shocked to hear that Bridgeton jobcentre was closing. They had no idea. That walk was possible for fit and healthy Green activists and councillors, but it is not possible for many of the people who have to use the services of a jobcentre—people who have young children, people with disabilities and those with health conditions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you come to a close, please, Mr Greer?

**Ross Greer:** The examples that we have given are nothing compared with what the people on Benbecula will have to face.

The proposals are plainly ridiculous and will only cause further pain. They are not being consulted on properly and they must be opposed, including by Conservative members of this Parliament.

15:58

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I commend the Government for its excellent motion and Labour for its amendment. We will support both this evening. The Jobcentre Plus network has been and remains an essential physical edifice for social security and employability in our society.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will not give way in my first 20 seconds. I will make some progress before I take an intervention from Mr Tomkins.

The network has connected untold millions with work and career opportunities while bringing help and access to people who rely on the financial assistance of the state in times of economic inactivity. We can trace the jobcentre back to the Labour Exchanges Act 1909, which was a Liberal construct under the Government of Asquith and was the first effort by a national Administration to seek to connect the labour market with opportunities for work and to foster that most Liberal of principles—social mobility.

I will take an intervention from Professor Tomkins.

**Adam Tomkins:** I just wanted to make sure that the member is in the right debate, because there is no Labour amendment for him to support this evening.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will take that on the chin.

Let me take members back to 1909. In the second reading of the Labour Exchanges Bill, Lord Dalzell, a Liberal peer, said:

"I do not think it is necessary for me to elaborate in any way the great distress and misery which arise from lack of work."

He went on to say:

"relief works cannot seriously be regarded as a cure for unemployment. At the best they are only a palliative. What is wanted is not a drug to still the pain of this disease, but a cure which will reach deep down to its roots."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 August 1909; Vol 2, c 877-8.]

There, in that sentence, members have the creation of the labour exchange movement.

Throughout the eleven decades that followed, and over the course of two world wars, eight recessions and the ebb and flow of industrialisation, urbanisation and automation, the labour exchange, and subsequently the jobcentre network, has been a lodestone in our nation's efforts to bring work rather than charity and, by extension, hope to the masses.

I am in no way suggesting that circumstances have not changed over the course of history. The inexorable shift towards online service provision has reduced footfall in some cases, thereby reducing the business case for some of the sector. However, the news from the DWP that as part of the 2015 spending review it will renegotiate all Jobcentre Plus tenancies came as a hammer blow to communities that experience the backwash and churn between hard times and prosperity.

The DWP was right to say that eight out of 10 JSA claims and almost all universal credit applications, given the strictures in that regard, are made online. However, although jobcentres might no longer be the gateway to social security, they can still play a vital role in connecting people to work and skills development. The vital face-to-face connection is as important as it ever was. As Lord Dalzell said in 1909 of the labour exchange:

"Its object is the same as that of any other exchange—to bring buyer and seller together."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 August 1909; Vol 2, c 878.]

If the jobcentre did nothing more than that, it would amply justify its existence. Lord Dalzell's words ring as true as they ever did.

**Ross Greer:** I am enjoying Mr Cole-Hamilton's reaching back into history, but in relation to a more recent era, is he proud of his party's record in Government with the Conservatives on expanding the sanctions regime through the jobcentres?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I always welcome an intervention from Ross Greer, but I think that that was a bit of a cheap shot, considering that the Liberal Democrats were the tempering influence on a Government that is now operating unbridled. I

thank Mr Greer for shattering the consensus of the debate.

The fact is that it is the hardest to reach people who will be worst affected by the retrograde step that is proposed. There is consensus on that in this Parliament. The closures will rip the ladders of social mobility away from some of the most deprived communities in our society, at a time when we might be on the verge of needing them as we have never needed them before.

What baffles me is that the Tory UK Government, which is so fond of the adage, "Let's mend the roof while the sun shines", is looking to strip the timbers off the canopy on the basis of short-term and transient employment figures—at a time when we stand on the precipice of the economic uncertainty that Brexit represents. The prudence of the Conservative Party does not appear to extend to the needs of people who are adrift from the labour market, and I see no evidence of a plan to scale up support in the event of economic calamity.

We all remember that Norman Tebbit said:

"I grew up in the 30s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot; he got on his bike and looked for work".

In that famous couple of lines, we see the mettle of Tory ideology, but it is much harder for a person to get on their bike and look for work if they are in a wheelchair or more than two bus rides away from the nearest jobcentre, as members have said. That is why the equality impact assessment that the Scottish Government rightly proposes is so essential in any service redesign.

What matters is not just the physical proximity of jobcentres to people who are furthest from the labour market, but the local knowledge, the personal one-to-one advice, the internet access and the wraparound services that make the support so effective. At a time when economic inactivity is having an impact on people who are impeded by a range of social barriers, we must not blindly remove local access to the exchange of labour and, in so doing, erect further barriers to employment and social mobility.

16:04

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I was slightly confused by Mr Cole-Hamilton's speech, on which I would have liked to intervene. I am not sure whether he is supporting the Conservatives' amendment.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** No, I am not.

**Sandra White:** He is not supporting the Conservative amendment. There we are. I just wanted clarification on that point. I can now include Mr Cole-Hamilton in my thanks to all my colleagues—apart from the Tories—who have

spoken in the debate. They have all made excellent and thoughtful speeches.

Various organisations and individuals have sent us stuff to look at, but I thank especially the *Evening Times* in Glasgow, which has been running the story constantly. It has provided great coverage and very welcome support in the campaign against the closures.

The closures will have a devastating effect on people throughout Scotland. There will be no jobcentre closures in my constituency, but there will be back-office closures, with the closure of the offices at Portcullis house and Corunna house. The closure of Corunna house is very serious, because it is where people go for medical assessments. If it closes along with the jobcentres, where will people go for medical assessments? That is a real worry.

The closures will also hit the most vulnerable people in society and—in most, if not all, cases—will have the opposite effect to helping people back into work. I echo what Labour members and others have said about the closures being not about helping people back into work, but about saving money. They show the Tories for what they are: they have no thought for the people in Glasgow and Scotland—their only thought is to save money. From what I can see, whatever Westminster says, that is what they are doing.

The Conservative amendment is a feeble amendment that seeks to change just two words in the motion. I wonder how long it took Mr Tomkins to draft it. As has been said, the amendment proposes a change from "will have" to "may have". It must have taken a lot of thinking by a member who has been an academic to come up with that. The last line of the Government's motion is that the Parliament

"calls on the DWP to halt the closures to allow the Scottish Government to bring forward substantive co-location proposals to save these jobcentres."

It is eminently sensible to keep that line in—I do not see anything at all wrong with it. However, the Tories want to take that out and replace it with

"calls on the Scottish Government to make plain its proposals as to how Skills Development Scotland or the proposed Scottish social security agency"

and so on. An awful lot of thought must have gone into that—or absolutely none at all.

Mr Tomkins, who is a member of the Social Security Committee, knows that the evidence that we have is that Damian Green and the rest of them at the DWP do not care what happens to the poor folk in Glasgow and Scotland, because they do not even reply to our letters. We write to them, saying that we asked them about something, and they do not reply. Then, all of a sudden, we read in

the newspapers that jobcentres are closing. That is how they treat us here—it is about time the Tories realised that.

Mr Tomkins is fond of talking about how good the all-party House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee is. Well, last year it said that Jobcentre Plus must be

“open to working in ways that are increasingly flexible”

and “adaptable”. That sounds quite good. I do not think that any of us would have any qualms about that. However, being flexible and adaptable does not mean shutting down 50 per cent of the jobcentres in Glasgow and putting nothing in their place. That is not being flexible and adaptable. Mr Tomkins can quote all he likes, but the fact of the matter is that the DWP does not care about people in Glasgow and Scotland.

The Westminster committee also mentioned that the DWP wants to save money and close jobcentres, but it called for a reduction of 20 per cent across the UK; it did not say that the DWP should close 50 per cent of its offices in Glasgow. That will be detrimental to Glasgow and to the rest of Scotland. It is about time the Tories here stood up and told people the truth. They can pick out what they like, but the truth is that 50 per cent of the jobcentre closures will be in Glasgow.

**John Mason:** Does Sandra White accept that the figure is 75 per cent in the east end of Glasgow, with three out of four jobcentres closing?

**Sandra White:** I accept that. John Mason is absolutely right.

Other members have talked about the £4.50 all-day bus fare. My constituency is fortunate, because the jobcentre in Partick is not closing, but the two medical assessment centres in the city centre are closing.

Jobcentres are closing in the east end, as John Mason said, and in other areas, including Castlemilk and in Bob Doris’s constituency. There is a bus service, but the train service is not all that great and people do not have the money to travel back and forth. That is what the UK Government should be told.

There should be no false tears and weeping from the Tories. They know exactly what is going on. It is a pity that when we write to the Westminster Government we do not get any replies, but when they write they do. It is a pity that we do not work together on co-location of the jobcentres and where people are going to be put, because we would like to know as much as anyone else would.

16:10

**Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):** In case members from the other parties cannot stay for the whole of my speech, on the Ross Greer scale I will probably be a disgrace and despicable by the end of it. I shall apply Lindhurst’s law of taking interventions only when I am drinking water—oh, my glass seems to be pretty empty.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in today’s debate on the future of the Jobcentre Plus network here in Scotland; it follows on from the 19 January members’ business debate on the Glasgow jobcentres.

As we know, the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee produced a report on the subject. Page 3 of the report’s summary makes it explicitly clear that the future of Jobcentre Plus is “one of change”. We may not all agree on what that change looks like, but it is vital that public services adapt to reflect the changing needs of the people that they serve.

I cannot go as far back as 1909, as one member did, but I can go back more than half a century to 1963, when President Kennedy spoke in Frankfurt. He summed up the issue quite well:

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

That is exactly what the changes are about: creating a fit-for-purpose network of jobcentres that are better able to meet the needs of those who require them most.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way? He may want to have a drink of water.

**Bill Bowman:** Let me make a little bit more progress, thank you.

I am sure that everyone in this chamber would welcome the fact that the number of people needing to use a jobcentre has fallen—

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Will the member give way?

**Bill Bowman:** Let me make a little bit more progress, please.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Is that a yes?

**Bill Bowman:** That is maybe, later.

The number of people now in work across the UK is 31.8 million. That is more than just a statistic—that is almost 32 million people going home with a pay packet in their pocket and able to provide for themselves and any family and dependants.

In my maiden speech, I mentioned that there is no better feeling or sense of satisfaction than being able to look after your family—

**Jamie Hepburn** *rose*—

**Alex Cole-Hamilton** *rose*—

**Bill Bowman:** I give way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Are you giving way to Jamie Hepburn or to Alex Cole-Hamilton?

**Bill Bowman:** I give way to the minister.

**Jamie Hepburn:** It is good to know that Mr Bowman prefers an intervention from me than from Mr Cole-Hamilton; that is instructive.

Mr Bowman refers to those who are in employment. This debate is about the unemployed and how we can better support them to get into employment. He suggests that the UK Government's proposals are about making the Jobcentre Plus better purposed for the future. Is that informed by any discussion or dialogue whatsoever with service users at the proposed jobcentres that are going to close?

**Bill Bowman:** I was just about to say that too many people are out of work and require the facilities and services offered by the Jobcentre Plus network.

Here in Scotland, according to the latest Office for National Statistics labour market briefing, the picture is a bit bleaker. There is an unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent, which is below that of Northern Ireland's 5.6 per cent rate, but above that of England and Wales.

I know that it is the case that in this chamber some members occasionally like to blame Westminster for what happens here. The reality is a little different, as was made clear last week when the SNP's budget was given a last-minute kiss of life by the Greens. Instead of growing our economy and putting more of our people back to work, the SNP and the Greens opted for a budget that will slash local services and make this country the highest taxed part of the UK—a regressive move that will do anything but encourage businesses to set up or to expand here.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Bill Bowman:** Yes.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am grateful to the member for giving way. Does he accept that the impact of Brexit and the resultant slide of our economy might well prevent many businesses from setting up in this country, and that that is entirely the result of his Government?

**Bill Bowman:** No. I have a background in business and commerce. In public services, as in business, it is important to look at how things can be done better.

Without repeating what was said in the debate two weeks ago, like my colleagues Adam Tomkins and Annie Wells, I neither condone nor condemn the DWP's proposals for Glasgow. Adam Tomkins and Annie Wells have raised concerns in the consultation and with the relevant ministers.

We need to understand that the labour market is changing and, as others have said, we all want to have a Jobcentre Plus network that provides more tailored support, where possible. That is a key point in the Commons select committee's report, which was accepted by that committee's members, including Mhairi Black—a name that members may not recognise.

That change in the labour market reflects the changing nature of the world that we live in. Eight out of 10 of those who make claims for jobseekers allowance and—as has been mentioned—99.6 per cent of applicants for universal credit submit their claims online. I am not suggesting that that means that the jobcentres are no longer needed, and I fully accept that not everyone has easy access to a computer or the internet, but it does mean that the number of people who need to visit the jobcentre is less than it was.

A lot has been said about the DWP's proposals and their aim to deal with the significant amount of underused space that the estate has. Another aim of the proposals is to give people the chance to visit a single building that offers a number of Government services—a social hub, if you like.

I want to conclude—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think you should, Mr Bowman.

**Bill Bowman:** I am concluding.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Well, hurry up.

**Bill Bowman:** I thank those who work in our jobcentre network up and down the country. They do a fantastic job in equipping people with the advice that they need to go back to work, and I believe that it is right that the Parliament acknowledges that.

Thank you for giving me the time to say that, Presiding Officer.

16:17

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Like many other members who have spoken in the debate, I was shocked and disappointed by the decision that was announced a week or so ago about the further jobcentre closures in Glasgow and throughout Scotland. It is just another in a long line of decisions that have been taken by the distant and remote Tory party in London with no regard for the people who are



involved, the surrounding businesses and the local communities that are affected.

As other members have said, the proposed closures are sure to have a devastating effect on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our society, many of whom are already living in poverty as austerity kicks in. For many vulnerable individuals, the process of sanctions and the difficulty of maintaining appointments because of health worries and disability are already enough of a challenge without further barriers being put in place. It is very clear that the changes that are being implemented by Westminster are not being made with the people in mind; it is also clear that the UK Government has absolutely no ambition to lift those who are most in need out of poverty and into work.

My constituency has already experienced a jobcentre closure decision—it did so in January 2006, which was before my time as an MSP. The jobcentre in Coatbridge, one of the most impoverished areas in our country, was closed down by the then Labour UK Government, which was ignorant of the changing needs of its old industrial heartlands. Service users in my constituency are now redirected to jobcentres in Airdrie, Bellshill and Cumbernauld, and no additional contribution to travel costs is made. For some users, that is a bus trip that they would previously never have had to make, and when money is tight, as is so often the case when someone is seeking employment, those additional expenses can become problematic.

Such decisions can impact on many other areas of people's lives, including their mental health. I would like to take the opportunity to highlight the fact that, later today, I am hosting a reception for the Scottish Association for Mental Health in the garden lobby. The organisation does fantastic work throughout Scotland, including in my constituency, and I hope that members from across the chamber will be able to come along.

As I said, many of my constituents who are jobseekers are now directed elsewhere. Last week, I visited Airdrie jobcentre. I was meant to go with my colleague Alex Neil MSP but, as members will know, he is off unwell at the moment; I wish him a speedy recovery.

**Members:** Hear, hear.

**Fulton MacGregor:** While I was there I met district manager Etta Wright and a group of the job coaches. The visit was very encouraging, and it was clear that the enthusiastic staff at the centre offer an excellent and dynamic service; indeed, I am glad that Bob Doris and others have mentioned that. I heard about the team's dedication to ensuring that their service delivery is and continues to be customer focused, something

that I think the jobcentre can be very proud of. I was also really struck by the work ethic of the job coaches, and it was obvious that the employees there really care about people who come through the doors. It is just a real pity that some people need to travel there from the back of Coatbridge, which is more than 5 miles away.

Unfortunately, the closure of the jobcentre is not where the story ends for Coatbridge. What Thatcher started in the 1980s when she savaged the old industries and closed the steel works at the Calder where my grandad worked, and what Blair's Labour continued by hitting us while we were down with the closure of the jobcentre, is being taken even further by this new crop of Tory London-based MPs, with the UK Government's announcement of the closure of the DWP processing unit at South Circular Road in Coatbridge. It is no wonder that people in my constituency wanted self-determination and voted yes in 2014, after years of a UK Government that was so out of touch with our needs and which continued to heap misery on our area.

What is worse, as others have pointed out, is the way in which the whole situation has been handled. Just under two weeks ago, I received a worried message from one of my constituents who has been employed at the centre for years. She told me that she had just been told, without any prior consultation at all, that the unit would be closing next year at the latest and that she would be moved to Motherwell or Glasgow. I had received no notification of that from the DWP, and it was only later that I got a tokenistic letter from Damian Hinds MP that confirmed what, by that stage, I already knew. The MP for the area, Phil Boswell, and I have now had conversations with the union representatives and I have set up a meeting with the manager, Alan Bowman, for 6 March to ensure that staff are fully supported. I have also written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to urge him to halt these summary closures of services throughout Scotland.

Approximately 234 staff in Coatbridge will be affected, with the vast majority coming from the town itself. Coatbridge Main Street has been struggling under North Lanarkshire Council rates for years, and with the closure of the DWP processing centre, coupled with the recently announced closure of Airdrie Savings Bank at the Fountain, the remaining local businesses on Main Street will feel the pressure more than ever. The situation is getting beyond a joke, as has been highlighted by a recent article in the *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser*, and I have now taken steps to set up a public meeting involving local traders and other partners to find a way of stemming this tide.

Last week, we had a heritage debate in this chamber, and it was good to hear my town's history being praised by MSPs across the various parties. However, there is a more fundamental story here. Tory Governments have ripped the heart out of these communities and slowly but surely the SNP and this Government—and I do not mind saying that—are trying to help get them back together. My constituency wants full control and self-determination and—we should make no mistake about it—the attacks from this UK Government on areas that had the biggest yes votes are no coincidence. It might well be a real-life example of “The Empire Strikes Back”. That is why I commend the minister's motion and ask for a reversal of these decisions.

16:23

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** The case for jobcentre closures has not been made. A child can see that what is driving the consultation is the fact that the DWP's lease arrangements are coming to an end and that it is working backwards to justify this move. None of the rationale that I have heard so far in any way passes the test of whether the needs of the people who rely on jobcentres will be met.

This feels like an attack on the jobless and an attack on a city like Glasgow. The Tories say that the best route out of poverty is to get a job; I agree, but people need their jobcentres to help them find that route to a job. If the DWP's aspiration is to create a new system, I think that that is a fair argument, but can the Tories not see that such a move is out of step with the needs of Glaswegians, certainly, and those from other poorer cities?

As we have heard, the closures will compound poverty and hardship and will add to the costs for almost every single person affected. The transport difficulties that we have heard about are not imagined; they will be real, and I believe that they will lead to ill health in many people as they worry about how they will get the extra bus or how they will be able to travel much further if the jobcentres close.

As we have heard, there will be a 20 per cent cut in jobcentres nationally, but Glasgow will lose half of its jobcentres if the consultation does not conclude in a different way. Bridgeton, Parkhead and Easterhouse are in the top 5 to 10 per cent of the most deprived areas in the country, and they are served by three jobcentres that face closure. We have heard that the rationale for that is that there is a move to online access, that the 20-year lease arrangements have come to an end, and that, apparently, the claimant figures are dropping. I will address that point later.

Bill Bowman's John F Kennedy quote was rather out of step with the debate. I ask him in all seriousness to listen. I can speak only for Glasgow, which is the city that I know. Perhaps he is not familiar with the fact that the uptake of online digital access by Glaswegians is the lowest anywhere in the country. Half of Glaswegians have no computer at home. How will the DWP's aspirations ever be met? According to surveys, seven out of 10 people need support to help them online. Glasgow is not ready for the change; it is completely out of step. That is not an anti-DWP argument; that is just plain to see.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I very much concur with Pauline McNeill's point about the problems that people in Glasgow and other areas have in accessing IT facilities. When I was in Maryhill, I heard very clearly that people rely on their local jobcentre to access IT facilities. The same will apply in other areas. Does Pauline McNeill therefore agree that we are talking about a counterproductive move?

**Pauline McNeill:** That is exactly the point that I am making. I do not disagree that there might be a beneficial aspiration for people to go online, but that is out of step with people's experiences on the ground. The DWP must take account of that in the consultation.

Other members have talked about solutions. I want to address Annie Wells's points. Perhaps there are solutions, but the Tories cannot just hide behind the fig leaf of the process. That is all that we have heard, and that is what the amendment addresses. Annie Wells made some very good points, but is there any prospect that the DWP will seriously look at the matter? Members should bear it in mind that claimants will still require to sign on every two weeks. Satellites will not be an answer to that. Perhaps the Tories would like to address that point.

I will move on to the Tories' spin in the 19 January debate about the claimant count dropping by 44 per cent. I accept that that figure is true, but we must consider that the figures that the Tories used are those from 2010 to 2016. Most people accept that the post-financial crash figures show a spike in the unemployment figures. If we look at the figures for 2016, we see that they have pretty much settled to pre-crash levels. I ask the Tories to consider that. The drop in the claimant count is accounted for in that way, and it really is unfair to use that as one of the justifications for closing Glasgow's jobcentres.

It simply cannot be just about the process. We have heard many others talk about their visits to jobcentres. I have made visits to the Partick and Castlemilk jobcentres. Some of the poorest people live in Castlemilk. It is quite clear that they will

have to take three buses to attend Newlands jobcentre, which is the nearest one to them.

In conclusion, if there is to be any real consensus among the parties in this Parliament to fight the jobcentre closures—it is imperative that we win that fight—there must be a meeting of the ways with the Tory MSPs who represent Glasgow because, unless they are prepared to condemn some of the closures, I do not see that the DWP will listen to the rest of us.

It needs to be recognised in the consultation that there has already been a breach of the DWP's rules on travel arrangements. There must be a single message from the Parliament that the level of jobcentre closures that we are discussing is out of step with the needs of the people of Scotland.

16:29

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** If the UK Government and the DWP seriously believe that work is the best route out of poverty, it must be made as easy as possible for people to enter the workplace; it must not be made more difficult. It is important to think about the impact that closing jobcentres will have on surrounding services. Jobcentre staff already face increased pressure because of the roll-out of universal credit, increased conditionality for lone parents and people in work, and the increasing digitalisation of social security. My constituency of Greenock and Inverclyde has long-term high levels of deprivation, and closing the jobcentre in Port Glasgow will not improve that situation.

MSPs from across the chamber have explained the closure process, so I will not go over that ground again. I will focus my attention on my constituency. First, I welcome the announcement that the 28 staff at the Port Glasgow jobcentre will not lose their jobs and are to be redeployed to the Greenock jobcentre. Secondly, I welcome the announcement that those who claim JSA and the equivalent universal credit at the Port Glasgow jobcentre will get their travelling expenses paid for additional meetings above their fortnightly scheduled meeting. However, the obvious question is how long that will happen for. In addition, if the target is to save £180 million, how does paying for travelling expenses help to save that money?

We know that the UK National Audit Office indicated that the cost of administering the sanctions system is £285 million per annum, and the UK Government expects to save £132 million from sanctioning JSA and ESA claimants. Given the introduction of policies like that by the Tory Government, it is no wonder that the UK debt mountain is £1.8 trillion and the deficit is £68.2 billion.

The Tory Government claims that it needs fewer jobcentre offices to cover the UK because people tend to submit their claims for benefits online. Gordon Lindhurst failed to accept the point that many people do not have access to the required technology, whereas Bill Bowman at least had the grace to appreciate that point. Not everyone is inclined to use the internet and if someone is older, has a visual impairment, and is not tech savvy, the so-called old-fashioned way is vital. That point was raised with the Minister for Social Security, Jeane Freeman, when she spoke at the RNIB Scotland fringe event at the SNP conference.

As we know, however, unemployment claimants are still required to attend jobcentres at least every two weeks, with the UK Government having trialled weekly sign-ons and even more intensive daily sign-ons. The DWP work services director for Scotland, Denise Horsfall, admitted that no one has tested the distance that claimants will need to travel to another jobcentre—and the time that that will take—when their local jobcentre closes. Denise Horsfall said that the DWP used Google Maps for measuring such distances, which is, frankly, shameful and an insult to everyone who will be adversely affected.

The DWP's closure calculations give absolutely no consideration to the particular circumstances of each community or to the topography, geography, demographics and long-term nature of unemployment in our communities. Three miles might be a walkable distance in good weather for those who are fit and healthy, but it will be another significant barrier for others. Putting additional barriers in the way of people getting into employment is a ridiculous position to take, and the Tories in this chamber, particularly those who represent the west of Scotland—a couple of them are here at the moment—should be ashamed of their party down in London for introducing the closures policy. I ask them to stand up for their constituents and ensure that the proposed closures do not happen.

The word that was used most commonly by the Tories in the article 50 debate yesterday was "grievance". I confess that I have a grievance against Westminster policies that are punitive. I have a grievance against members of a political elite who give little consideration to those people who need their assistance. I have a grievance against Westminster policies that have led to long-term unemployment in constituencies like mine. The eradication of the manufacturing base in Inverclyde in the 1970s and 1980s led to my community struggling, but it is now beginning to move forward.

However, Inverclyde currently has 41 data zones in the 15 per cent most deprived areas in

Scotland, which in percentage terms means that 36 per cent of Inverclyde's data zones feature in the 15 per cent most deprived areas in the country—that is not a record that Westminster should be proud of. Despite the tens of millions of pounds ploughed into Inverclyde via the creation of the urban regeneration company Riverside Inverclyde, the hundreds of new homes built by the housing associations, the new schools being built via the local authority and the Scottish Government, and the investment by businesses determined to make a success in Inverclyde, things are still tough. That goes to show how bad Westminster has been for my constituency and shows the catch-up job that the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government have on their hands in trying to move all of Inverclyde forward.

Income and employment deprivation continue to be higher in Inverclyde than in Scotland as a whole. Inverclyde also has a higher proportion of people who are economically inactive due to a long-term health condition or disability than most other local authorities in Scotland have. That means that, in Inverclyde, there is also a higher proportion of JSA and ESA claimants with a limiting disability who are required to attend jobseeker interviews. As long as the sanctions regime continues to punish people for even slight lateness, the closure of jobcentres might lead to more people being unduly penalised. I also have a grievance against Westminster for that.

The closures of jobcentres around the country are more to do with a Tory agenda to penalise the most disadvantaged in our communities than they are to do with requirement. Austerity is not inevitable or even advisable, as the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and others tell us. Jobcentres that are being closed in disadvantaged communities are the next victim of the Tory Government's draconian austerity agenda. Even Margaret Thatcher did not fully manage to do that.

16:35

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** We have had a good debate today on a very difficult issue and I hope that it will bring as much cross-party consensus as possible to the chamber.

There have been some surreal moments in the chamber this afternoon. In his keenness to support a Lib-Lab coalition, Alex Cole-Hamilton supported a Labour amendment that did not exist. If only there were more of you, Alex, and more of us, that coalition could be a reality.

We learned from Gordon Lindhurst that he is Mr No. Ross Greer seemed to give an invitation of sorts to Jackie Baillie, which made me think of the song, "Just the two of us". I was particularly

delighted to hear the implication from Sandra White that the brains of front-bench Conservative Party members were intellectually challenged—that was a pleasure. We heard from Bill Bowman and, having heard of a glass-half-empty person and a glass-half-full person, I now know that Bill Bowman is a glass-empty person.

Moving to the serious elements of the debate, I thank all our DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff, as the minister did before me. Many of the staff have a thankless task in really challenging circumstances. Other people in our public services—such as national health service staff—get recognition, and it is important that we also thank DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff, who are obviously anxious at this time.

I am delighted to say that I stand shoulder to shoulder with Jamie Hepburn and the SNP Government on the issue of jobcentres and I think that the motion in the name of the minister is very balanced and fair. It makes a plea for dialogue with the UK Government, for consideration of co-location and for the closures to be halted to give the Scottish Government more time to see what it can do to support local people and local jobcentres. I hope that the UK Government will consider that invitation very seriously.

I repeat Sandra White's thanks to the *Glasgow Evening Times*, which has run a phenomenal campaign on jobcentres and which has sought to bring together Glasgow elected representatives from all political parties in support of our communities. In that spirit of cross-party work, I thank Bob Doris, who led a members' business debate on the issue a couple of weeks ago, which I was pleased to support. I thank Stuart McDonald MP, who took the initiative and brought together MPs, MSPs and council group leaders to send a letter to the UK Government. They asked the Government to think again about those proposals and they gave a direct invitation to the secretary of state.

I welcome the cross-party support on the issue of jobcentres, but I think that we can get cross-party support more often on issues of importance to the city of Glasgow, whether it is on police station closures, hospital closures—for example, the Lightburn hospital—or the issue of Glasgow City Council's budget being cut by £377 million since 2007. I hope that we can find cross-party consensus to not only pick flaws and talk up injustices done by Westminster, but to expose injustices done by Holyrood to the people of Glasgow and other difficult communities. That is why I welcome George Adam's comment that he will work to his last dying breath to fight these closures. I hope that he will also work to his last dying breath against the proposed closure of

paediatric services at the Royal Alexandra hospital.

I hope that Stuart McMillan will fight to his last dying breath to save the maternity unit at the Inverclyde royal hospital. Wherever bad decisions come from—whether they come from the UK Government or the Scottish Government—it is important that all elected members work together to defend the communities that they represent.

Let us be clear about the jobcentre proposals. There has been no engagement. It is simply unacceptable for people to read about these things in the newspaper and for there to be little or no consultation. Like Mark Griffin, I think that it is unacceptable that Ruth Davidson can hide behind other people in this debate. She should speak out about the closure that is happening in her constituency and call out the failures of the UK Government on this issue.

Like Pauline McNeill, I do not think that the case has been made for the closures. The impact that they will have on communities has not been considered; it is another uncaring decision from an uncaring Government. We know from history that for the Conservative Party, unemployment is a price worth playing, and that is unacceptable.

Ross Greer was right to mention sanctions. The UK Government sanctions people for not turning up for their fortnightly appointment. If it makes it harder for people to attend, they are more likely to be sanctioned, and that is not acceptable. I hope that we can find some cross-party opposition to that.

I realise that I am in my last few seconds, Presiding Officer. This decision has not been thought through, it has been made without any consultation and it is not respected by this Parliament or local communities. I would expect better from the UK Government. I hope that David Mundell and the minister, Damian Hinds, will take up the invitation to come directly to local communities and hear for themselves why the decision is wrong and why they should be standing up and defending the most vulnerable people in our communities.

16:41

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We have had a lively debate and there have been a number of robust contributions from across the chamber. There has been some consensus on the concerns relating to proposed closures of Jobcentre Plus sites across Scotland. There has also been clear recognition of the invaluable work that is done by DWP staff across Scotland, and I repeat what a number of members have said by thanking those staff.

At the same time as this debate has been taking place, the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster has been hearing evidence on the same topic. I will mention later some of the issues coming out from that meeting.

The Scottish Government's motion

"calls on the DWP to provide more detail on the timing, scope and rationale for these closures".

That has been echoed in a number of members' speeches. We have heard from Bob Doris, Jackie Baillie and Annie Wells and others the concerns that have been expressed by their constituents about the closure of their local jobcentre. We have heard concerns about the insufficient timing and scope of the public consultation process and concerns that the internal and public announcements of the proposals should have been handled better.

We agree with many of those concerns, and we believe that the consultation process should be extended to all of the eight Glasgow jobcentres in question. We also agree that it is important to balance any proposed changes with continuing to ensure that vulnerable local residents who need additional assistance—whether because of disability, long-term health issues or other reasons—get that assistance. Annie Wells set out a number of very good practical ideas for how that might be taken forward. We hope that the current consultation process, as well as the debates in this chamber and in the House of Commons, will provide the DWP with a full and better understanding of the concerns.

Although we agree that more details are required on the timing and the scope of the reorganisation, we think that the DWP has made clear the rationale behind the reorganisation.

**Pauline McNeill:** I am genuinely interested in the proposals that Annie Wells put forward—I would not reject them outright. However, members have talked about the difficulties in getting to jobcentres. If the eight jobcentres are closed, people will still have to sign on every two weeks. A satellite arrangement will not really help that.

**Dean Lockhart:** That goes to the point about the two-way dialogue and the consultation process. I hope that, as a result of the consultation process, we will see a consensus around some of those practical issues.

I turn to the rationale behind the reorganisation. As the all-party House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has said:

"The future of Jobcentre Plus ... is one of change".

That statement was approved by Mhairi Black MP, among others. We agree with that and many of the drivers for the change are positive. Across

Scotland, the claimant count has declined from 135,000 six years ago to 81,000 last month. As Adam Tomkins said, the claimant count in Glasgow has declined by 40 per cent. The fall in claimant count across the UK and Scotland has resulted in underutilisation in the Jobcentre Plus network by as much as 40 per cent in places such as Glasgow.

One observation that is coming out of the Scottish Affairs Committee this afternoon is that Glasgow will have more jobcentres per 1,000 people than Birmingham or Sheffield, even if the proposed closures go ahead. I therefore recommend to members that they look at the meeting of the Scottish Affairs Committee. I am not saying that that is a justification for the proposals, but it is an interesting observation.

**Ross Greer:** Will the member give way?

**Dean Lockhart:** I would like to make a bit of progress.

Other reasons are driving the change to the network. The increasing digitalisation of services has resulted in a more accessible welfare system. More than 80 per cent of JSA claims are made online and more than 99 per cent of applications for universal credit are submitted online.

**Stuart McMillan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Dean Lockhart:** I will later.

In addition, the introduction of a more simplified welfare system, such as universal credit, has helped to streamline the system. All those changes to the welfare system now mean that the DWP needs less than 80 per cent of the office space that it currently occupies.

**Stuart McMillan:** In my speech, I made a point about people who are either blind or visually impaired. If we are to help those people to get back into the workplace, the jobcentres are crucial. If the jobcentres are not there, how will that happen?

**Dean Lockhart:** I agree that additional support must continue to be made available to those individuals.

A number of members have said that the reorganisation is about reducing floor space. I do not agree. There are two much more important elements to it, the first of which is how the DWP can best use its budget to concentrate on helping the people who need it most. The plan will save £180 million a year over 10 years, which is up to £2 billion. Rather than spending £2 billion on empty space, the DWP aims to recruit 2,500 additional work coaches in the next period; that includes 122 new work coaches who were

recruited last year in Scotland, and more going forward.

**Bob Doris:** Will the member give way?

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Dean Lockhart:** Not right now. I am sure that members agree that that is a much better use of money than spending it on empty space.

The second element is that the reorganisation is about reflecting the changing demands that are placed on the Jobcentre Plus service. It recognises that jobcentres these days are not just about finding jobs. They are places in which adult learning issues, skills acquisition, mental health issues and disability issues, as well as social security, are discussed. To meet those changing demands, the DWP is not cutting back services: it is expanding the level of services across a different network.

The Scottish Government's motion suggests that it might have co-location proposals that would address some of the issues that I have mentioned. If that is the case, we would welcome them and I look forward to hearing the specific details. It has been more than two months since the changes were first announced.

We look forward to hearing the outcome of the consultation exercise. We will remain fully engaged with it, and we look forward to an outcome that balances the need for change with the needs of vulnerable people in our communities. We also look forward to hearing about the Scottish Government's co-location proposals, and to seeing a more joined-up working arrangement between the UK Government and the Scottish Government. As our amendment makes clear, this is a two-way process and we look forward to a closer working relationship. I support the amendment in Adam Tomkins's name.

16:49

**Jamie Hepburn:** I thank those members who have taken part in today's debate. It has certainly been an opportunity for most of us to lay out our concerns about the broad thrust of all the closures, and for individual members to raise their concerns when there are closures proposed for their areas.

I thought that, at the start of my closing speech, it would be useful to start at the logical place—the beginning—and take a look at the process that has led us to where we are today. In his opening speech, Adam Tomkins said that it was sensible for DWP to review its Jobcentre Plus estate. I do not disagree with that per se—I am not convinced that anyone has said anything that is in disagreement with that perspective. He noted that the Anniesland office is two-thirds empty, with two

floors being unused, and all the Conservative members spoke about the fact that the lease arrangements are coming to an end. I accept that all that might be the case, but none of it is an argument for removing jobcentres from Anniesland or any of the communities that they serve. I agree with the point that was made well by Jackie Baillie and Pauline McNeill, which is that it is peculiar to predicate a decision about which communities should be supported on the mere fact that lease arrangements for particular offices are coming to an end.

**Ross Greer:** Given that Dean Lockhart has brought up the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee having a session on this subject at the same time as we are having this debate, I thought that the minister might like to know that a Conservative member of that committee has just said that the evidence that the committee has heard against the DWP's proposals is compelling, and that the department should start the process again.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I can only hope that Conservative members in this Parliament hear that salient message from one of their colleagues south of the border. I also hope that UK Government ministers have been watching the progress of our debate in the Scottish Parliament as assiduously as Mr Lockhart was watching the progress of the evidence-taking session of the UK Parliament's select committee.

I did not agree with much of what Gordon Lindhurst said, but I agreed with him when he said that it is people who matter, not buildings. In this instance, we are concerned not with the bricks and mortar but with the proposals to withdraw from communities. Mr Tomkins and Mr Bowman made much of the unanimous view of the Work and Pensions Select Committee that Jobcentre Plus has to reform. Again, I do not think that anyone would dispute that any public institution should be subject to reform, revision and change. However, we are not debating the process of reform; we are debating a specific set of closure proposals, which, as we have just heard, at least one Conservative member of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee concedes there is no evidence base for.

We are told that Tory members here neither "condone" nor "condemn" these proposals. Well, the Tories are clearly looking to cull and close these jobcentres.

Adam Tomkins urged me to demonstrate more maturity in my approach to this issue. If he does not mind me saying so, I think that that was uncharacteristically churlish of him. I suppose that my intervention on him must have irked and upset him a little bit. He knows—because, along with other members who represent the city of Glasgow,

I have made every effort to let him know—that I have sought to engage with DWP ministers to seek ways in which we can pursue alternatives to the closures, and I will continue to do so. On 30 January, officials from Skills Development Scotland and the DWP had a meeting. Skills Development Scotland has responded to the DWP's consultation and has set out specific proposals for how it might be able to allow for a continued service from its premises at specific locations in Glasgow, and it will undoubtedly be happy to continue to engage in that dialogue in other parts of the country. I am happy to consider various ways in which we can work with others.

I know that the leader of the opposition in Glasgow City Council has set out concerns about the closures in Glasgow, and local authorities can have a role to play in this matter. Bob Doris clearly made the point that there are third sector community organisations in Maryhill, which he represents, that could be part of the equation in supporting the continued provision of services.

Annie Wells made a number of innovative suggestions about ways in which we could approach outreach services. I will happily pursue each and every suggestion that she has earnestly made. However, I think that it was telling that, when I asked what response she and Mr Tomkins have had from the DWP to their propositions, she could not confirm that she has even received a response. It seems that problems in achieving two-way dialogue are not restricted to the two Administrations and that the problems also occur within the Conservative Party.

Mr Tomkins and other Conservative members have urged me to provide real proposals for co-location. I will readily commit to doing that. We are already starting to work towards that, as I have set out. I have just committed to hear any suggestions from any member about how services can be better aligned. I will readily take real proposals to the UK Government, and I will readily make our proposals publicly available so that members of the Parliament and the public know about them. I will readily commit to the proposition that is set out in the Conservative amendment to make our proposals plain.

Let me make this clear: it is a little rich to hear the Tories' criticism—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, minister. I ask members coming into the chamber to do so quietly and to refrain from private conversations.

**Jamie Hepburn:** They were not putting me off, Presiding Officer.

It is a little rich to hear Tory criticism of our inability thus far to make real proposals when we have had no consultation from the DWP and no

prior notification from the DWP about its closures. It is rather difficult to make proposals for specific locations when we find out about closures only when they are publicly announced.

There was a clear example of the poor process of consultation and communication when my friend George Adam—who is, as we all know, the assiduous and ardent representative of his home town of Paisley—told us that he has had no communication, as the town's representative, from the UK Government about the closure that will take place there. That is completely unacceptable, and I can assure Mr Adam that I will raise the matter with Damian Hinds and Damian Green.

Perhaps Tory members will wish to reflect on the process that has been engaged in by their party in government south of the border. It is a telling example that we have some way to go to make paragraph 58 of the Smith commission agreement real and meaningful. The arguments that I deploy on making it meaningful are not some obscure constitutional argument that is made for its own sake, lest anyone make that suggestion. The process that has taken place sets out how, if the arrangements were in place, they would provide a practical way to explore how better to support people into employment.

Many members spoke about their local issues. Bob Doris had his members' business debate on the situation in Maryhill; Clare Haughey spoke about her constituency; and Jackie Baillie and Ross Greer spoke about the circumstances in Alexandria. Like Mr Doris, I know the area very well. My father's family were from that part of the world, and I understand the travel difficulties there. They will be reflected in other areas, but I very much understand the travel difficulties in that particular area, between Alexandria and Dumbarton.

If I heard Jackie Baillie correctly—I am sure that she will correct me if I am wrong—she suggested that the UK Government had invited her to discuss the situation in Alexandria in London. The people concerned in the UK Government would do rather better to respond to the invites that Ms Baillie and Mr Greer have given them to visit the site in Alexandria and see what the reality on the ground is there—although, given the confusion between Musselburgh and Glasgow, they will probably need to find Alexandria on a map first. I will readily commit to visiting any community that is affected and to meeting representatives of any local organisation or service users who are affected by the changes, if any member wishes to invite me. I might even walk through the fields with Mr Greer and Ms Baillie if they invite me to do so.

Gordon Lindhurst spoke about the increased utilisation of online services. That is all well and good. However, he was talking about what was in

place in 1998; let me talk about what happened in May 2016. Citizens Advice Scotland undertook research showing that one in five clients of Jobcentre Plus cannot use a computer, that 21 per cent of them never use the internet, that 59 per cent cannot claim benefits online without help, and that 54 per cent cannot apply for a job online without help. It is rather rich to say that, because of the changed nature of the world, we can just move towards online applications. That does not reflect the reality on the ground.

I have not even spoken about the reality that the closures will increase sanctions. I hope that the UK Government has been listening to the debate. I am not particularly interested in getting the Tories in the Scottish Parliament to condemn or condone the closures. I am interested in getting this Parliament's voice heard by the UK Government, and I want all parties in the chamber to be part of that process.

In recent weeks, the Tories have often said that members should stand up and be counted and represent their constituents. Annie Wells and Adam Tomkins have raised concerns about the process in Glasgow, and Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Conservatives in this place, faces a potential jobcentre closure in her constituency. They and their colleagues should stand up for their constituents this evening. Let us back the motion, get the UK Government to halt the process and ensure a continued service for people who need it to get into employment.



## Business Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-03901, 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 21 February 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: National Review of Maternity and Neonatal Services

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Rate Resolution

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Appointments to the Scottish Fiscal Commission

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 22 February 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Scottish Government Response to Social Security Consultation

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: The Scottish Patient Safety Programme

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Digital Economy Bill – UK Legislation

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 23 February 2017

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 Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland)

Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 28 February 2017

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 1 March 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Culture, Tourism and External Affairs;  
Justice and the Law Officers

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 2 March 2017

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.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move en bloc motions S5M-03902, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument; S5M-03904, on suspension and variation of standing orders; and S5M-03903 and S5M-03906, on designation of lead committees.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Social Housing Charter be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 9.10.2A of Standing Orders be suspended and the following be substituted as alternative provision for the purposes of consideration of the Budget (Scotland) Bill at Stage 3—

“2A. Subject to paragraph 6, where a member of the Scottish Government or a junior Scottish Minister intends to move an amendment to the Budget (Scotland) Bill at Stage 3, that member shall give notice of the amendment by lodging it with the Clerk no later than 16:30 on Friday 10 February 2017. Amendments may be lodged until 16:30 on any day when the office of the Clerk is open.”

That the Parliament agrees that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Contract (Third Party Rights) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Farriers (Registration) Bill (UK Legislation).—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are three questions to be put today. The first question is, that amendment S5M-03873.1, in the name of Adam Tomkins, which seeks to amend motion S5M-03873, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on the future of the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 30, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-03873, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 91, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament is concerned at the impact that the announced closure of up to 23 Jobcentre Plus sites across Scotland by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will have on people and communities; recognises the negative outcomes on those who need to access Jobcentre Plus sites that these closures will bring; calls on the DWP to provide more detail on the timing, scope and rationale for these closures, alongside equality impact assessments; believes that the terms of paragraph 58 of the Smith Commission Agreement, which sets out that “the UK and Scottish Government will identify ways to further link services through methods such as co-location wherever possible and establish more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland” should have triggered more meaningful dialogue between the DWP and the Scottish Government on the future of Jobcentre Plus sites in Scotland, and calls on the DWP to halt the closures to allow the Scottish Government to bring forward substantive co-location proposals to save these jobcentres.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-03902, S5M-03904, S5M-03903 and S5M-03906. If any member objects, please say so now.

As no member objects, the question is, that motions S5M-03902, S5M-03904, S5M-03903 and S5M-03906 be agreed to.

### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Social Housing Charter be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 9.10.2A of Standing Orders be suspended and the following be substituted as alternative provision for the purposes of consideration of the Budget (Scotland) Bill at Stage 3—

“2A. Subject to paragraph 6, where a member of the Scottish Government or a junior Scottish Minister intends to move an amendment to the Budget (Scotland) Bill at Stage 3, that member shall give notice of the amendment by lodging it with the Clerk no later than 16:30 on Friday 10 February 2017. Amendments may be lodged until 16:30 on any day when the office of the Clerk is open.”

That the Parliament agrees that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Contract (Third Party Rights) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Farriers (Registration) Bill (UK Legislation).

## Trident (Case for Non-renewal)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-02776, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the Jimmy Reid Foundation's report "Trident and its Successor Programme". The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the recent report by the Jimmy Reid Foundation, *Trident and its Successor Programme*, and congratulates its joint-authors, Mike Danson, Karen Gilmore and Geoff Whittam; believes that it succinctly puts the case for non-renewal of Trident; understands that the authors based this on employment diversification and the moral, philosophical, economic and defence case for abandoning any proposal for what the UK Government terms as the successor weapons programme, which it plans to continue at HMNB Faslane/Coulport, and believes that its continued presence would be a threat to Glasgow and the majority of Scotland's population.

17:05

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** There is quite a lot to say in the debate, so I will not touch on every single element. I hope to make a few interesting points that might not have been considered before, as well as some points that are reasonably well known.

Before I start, I extend a warm welcome to the people in the gallery, including representatives of the Jimmy Reid Foundation, the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the "Ban the bomb" campaign, Medact Scotland, the "Navy not nuclear" campaign and many others, whose support illustrates the high level of public engagement on nuclear disarmament.

In November 2016, "Trident and its Successor Programme" was published by the Jimmy Reid Foundation and launched here in the Scottish Parliament. Today we welcome the findings of that report by bringing them into Scottish political discourse.

I will also take this opportunity to emphasise how we in the Scottish Parliament are not alone in re-examining the nuclear debate. Last year, I attended a United Nations General Assembly debate on holding a special conference this year to analyse the case for nuclear weapons being banned on the grounds of humanitarian concerns and the evidenced suffering by populations. The conference will result in a vote on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. It should be noted that the vote that established the conference, which will take place this year, had 126 nations for, 38 against and 16 abstentions. Confidence is therefore high that an historic decision will be made this July, which will validate the points that

are raised in the Jimmy Reid Foundation document. I believe that the well-researched findings of the Jimmy Reid Foundation have been affirmed by international discussion of them by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, in response to the tangible and very serious dangers of hosting and transporting nuclear weapons within a country.

I argue that to continue any nuclear weapons programmes in Scotland—especially weapons that are vulnerable to misfiring or error—is to undermine the basic function of governance: that is, the safety of the people within a state's borders.

Findings from the Jimmy Reid Foundation show not only that the case for Trident renewal is, based on their indiscriminate nature, redundant because of moral and philosophical considerations, but that the economic and job-oriented justifications for Trident renewal have been proved to be wishful thinking—that might be a nice way of putting it—according to the report, which states that fewer than

"600 civilian jobs are dependent on the existing Trident system at Her Majesty's Naval Base ... Clyde".

The figures are sourced from the Ministry of Defence, through the Westminster Parliament.

The evidence that was submitted by the Jimmy Reid Foundation is highly corroborated by UN House Scotland, United Nations Association Scotland, UNA Edinburgh and the respected Acronym Institute, through their draft report "The International Conference on Humanitarian and Environmental Impacts and Responsibilities of Hosting Nuclear Weapons". It highlighted that, since the two bombs were dropped on Japan at the end of the second world war, 2.5 million survivors have sought treatment by hospitals that are run by the Japanese Red Cross Society. Those hospitals exist purely for people who are still suffering the effects of weapons that were dropped more than 70 years ago. As recently as 2015, they treated 11,000 patients. The report's findings also show that DNA damage is evidenced by the number of child survivors who are now middle aged and elderly, who are suffering from cancer.

At this point, I will go off at a slight tangent if you do not mind, Presiding Officer. I would like to mention the situation of a friend of mine from Kazakhstan. Karipbek Kuyukov is a famous artist in central Asia, who has to hold the paintbrush between his teeth or in his toes. In common with 1.5 million people in his homeland, Karipbek was born with genetic damage from acute radiation syndrome that was caused by nuclear tests that the Soviet Union carried out in his home area. He was born of restricted height and is completely without arms, hands or fingers.

Karipbek is also an anti-nuclear weapons spokesperson back home. In that role, he was invited here to the Scottish Parliament two years ago, but he was refused a visa to enter the United Kingdom because he could not supply fingerprints to go with his passport identification. However, the human spirit is undimmed, and Karipbek Kuyukov sends his very best wishes for our deliberations here today and to all the Scottish people.

What about us? We are not immune to radiation, nor do we have a level of moral superiority that means that we should be trusted with weapons of mass destruction while others are seen as rogues. Some of them are rogues—there is no doubt about that, and there is no doubt about the fact that they might acquire nuclear weapons because we have them. Nuclear weapons exist in the world, which makes the world a more dangerous place, not a safer one. Real human security is for all peoples and cannot be maintained by the threat of annihilation of entire populations. Anyway, this is a small world and nuclear radiation cannot be contained within space and time.

Regarding the risk that is posed by accident or potential terrorist incident along the three-times-a-year nuclear convoy route—not only to Scottish residents, but to many other people in the UK, especially those who live in the Birmingham, Preston, Wetherby and Newcastle areas, which the convoys pass through—I note that, even without malice aforethought, plutonium and other radioactive materials can leak from warheads and contaminate communities, thereby greatly increasing cancer risks and causing major long-term environmental damage. Evidence suggests that, in extreme cases, accidents could trigger a nuclear reaction known as “inadvertent yield”, which would deliver lethal radiation doses.

Moreover, according to the MOD’s internal safety watchdog report, a terrorist attack could cause

“considerable loss of life and severe disruption both to the British people’s way of life and to the UK’s ability to function effectively as a sovereign state.”

That consideration falls in line with the evidence on what the larger humanitarian impact would be if such weapons were detonated in a war. The International Committee of the Red Cross projects that, if 100 nuclear weapons were targeted in the whole area of south-east Asia, for example, a projected 20 million people would die within the first week. In considering that that would be the impact of 100 nuclear warheads, we should remember that there are 240 warheads in the Trident fleet.

I end by saying that the very fact that the Jimmy Reid Foundation report has prompted this debate shows that we can still hope, that we can look to

this year’s UN conference with belief and that we are not helpless in the face of nuclear state obliteration, because we must all take responsibility for our own actions and those of our elected representatives. We sit here as elected representatives, and we represent the people who could be affected by these nuclear weapons. Thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kidd. I have 12 members wishing to speak in the debate. Due to that large number, I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 8.14.3, that the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.

*Motion moved,*

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

*Motion agreed to.*

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I absolutely concur with the debate being extended for as long as necessary, as I do for most members’ business debates. However, on a point of principle, when I wanted to move a similar motion yesterday, I was told that debate timings had been agreed by business managers. This is not about this debate; this is about a point of principle. Why is it—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Findlay, can I just halt you there?

**Neil Findlay:** Can I finish my point?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please sit down a minute.

One of the explanations for what happened—and I can see the point here—is that when business managers agree the time for a debate, not all amendments will have been lodged; amendments are sometimes lodged later. I understand that there is to be a discussion with the business managers about whether, when a lot of amendments are lodged in an important debate, thereby making the timings tighter, there can be further discussion on the timings for the debate.

Had the debate been extended yesterday, it would have meant moving decision time, and it would have meant a five-minute suspension, a vote and so on, all of which would have eaten into the debate. I agree that there is an issue, but business managers had agreed the timings on behalf of their parties—and the parties had an equal say.

The matter is worth revisiting and I understand that there is a desire on the part of members to consider it. As I said, when a lot of amendments come in, it changes the timings for the debate. The matter will be looked at. Is that okay?

**Neil Findlay:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That has taken a little time, but not a lot.

We move to the open debate, in which, I am afraid, speeches will be of four minutes.

17:15

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I thank Bill Kidd for bringing this members' business debate, and I thank the Jimmy Reid Foundation and the authors of the report for their hard work in putting the case for non-renewal of what is an obscene weapon on Scotland's shores.

The report shows the impact that the Trident successor programme will have on Scotland. It destroys the claims from Labour and Jackie Baillie that not renewing Trident will cost thousands of jobs. In reality, 600 civilian jobs are dependent on Trident at Faslane and Coulport, and the successor programme fails to bring a single new job to the base. Of course, those 600 jobs are vital to the community, but if there is no renewal there will still be work at the bases for civilian workers for the next 12 to 15 years. By that time, half those workers will have reached retirement age and others will have benefited from redeployment or voluntary exit from the sector.

Renewing Trident will also have major knock-on consequences for Clyde shipbuilding, with renewal costs meaning fewer orders of new type 26 frigates.

Scrapping Trident renewal is not a risk to jobs, but the astronomical cost of Trident—£200 billion—is costing jobs. We all know that the money could be spent far more productively. It could be used to counteract the continuing decline in armed forces expenditure—a decline that is causing job losses not just on the Clyde but across the country.

However, there is far more to the argument than pound notes. The recent Trident misfire and subsequent cover-up demonstrate the huge risk that those war machines present to us all. If the weapons are not risky enough, we cannot forget that the man who has control over them on our land is President Trump. Can anyone say, hand on heart, that such a prospect does not terrify them?

Then there are the warheads that are transported by road through Scotland's most populated city. The Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament estimates that an accident on the convoys could lead to plutonium and uranium spreading across distances as vast as 17km, covering most of Glasgow and outlying areas, including my constituency in East Dunbartonshire. The risk that the convoys pose to human life is

simply unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue.

The Clyde naval base was chosen to be home to the UK's nuclear submarines because of the depth of the Gare Loch. However, that body of water is nowhere near as deep as the splits in the Labour Party on Trident. Labour's position on Trident has become farcical, with a leader in Scotland who is in favour of nuclear weapons but opposes them, and a UK leader who is opposed to them but leads a party that supports their renewal. Confused? I certainly am.

**Neil Findlay:** Will Rona Mackay take an intervention?

**Rona Mackay:** No. I thank Neil Findlay, but I am almost finished.

The Scottish Government has a mandate to get rid of Trident. The Scottish National Party has been elected for an historic third term, and in every one of our manifestos we have said that we do not support Trident. Now is the time for us to start making plans about how we can get rid of it. We cannot wait for permission that we will never get from the UK Government. We have to go ahead and rid our country of that obscene political weapon.

We are the only party that can and will do that. We owe it to our children to support bairns, not bombs. I support the motion.

17:19

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Bill Kidd, who lodged the motion, has brought several debates on the subject, over a number of parliamentary sessions. Sometimes the obvious knee-jerk reaction on the part of Conservatives to people who bring such debates, particularly people who have a kind of schoolboy crush on unilateralism, is immediately to dismiss them.

I do not do that to Mr Kidd, because I have come to find him an extremely genuine, articulate, measured and—from the perspective of the argument that he makes—convincing proponent of the cause that he promotes. I have come to a different conclusion from him, but I do not in any sense dismiss the argument that he makes or the compassion with which he makes it. In the way that he articulates it, he demonstrates that he understands the nuance of it and the people who are involved in the ultimate consequence of anything that might arise from nuclear conflict. I believe that that is what genuinely motivates him in ensuring that the issue is raised repeatedly in the Scottish Parliament. I want to make those points absolutely clear at the beginning of my speech.

My own journey on the issue has been different. I was a child of the late 1950s who was born not long after the war—as were other members, who have come to different conclusions to mine. I was vaguely aware of, and then understood, the Cuban missile crisis of the 1960s, and the heightened international tension that arose over the Vietnam conflict and the geopolitical manoeuvring of the huge world superpowers. I understood the consequences of the Berlin airlift and, when I was in Berlin in 1983, I saw—as other members probably did during that cold war period—the reality of the stand-off between east and west, and it scared me. I was part of a generation who, at school, participated in a cadet force and grew up believing that we might actually have to fight a war, with conscription and all the international geopolitical conflict. I do not believe that my children have to consider that as a realistic and immediate prospect, but I did as I grew up.

When the Berlin wall fell, I flirted with the idea that all this might no longer be necessary. I have come to the view that I still believe in the nuclear deterrent but, in all the years leading up almost to the day on which the Berlin wall fell, I never imagined that that was a genuine possibility. I could not have predicted it. I did not anticipate such a huge change in the geopolitical balance of power in the world and, when I sat there in 1989, I did not foresee the wholly different way in which the world has since evolved and threats have emerged. Therefore, I cannot, with any certainty, look forward another 30 or 40 years and predict what the existential threats might be to peace, security, this island and the peoples on it.

For those reasons, I have come to the view that we should retain a proportionate nuclear deterrent as part of our defence capability. As a country, we have significantly reduced our reliance on it, in terms of the number of warheads that we have, and the cost per person is something like 20p in every £100 that will be spent on defence over the next 30 or 40 years. I recognise that others fundamentally disagree with my position. I also recognise that, when the issue came up most recently in the House of Commons, it was overwhelmingly supported by some 400-odd votes to 117 votes.

I do not know whether that will always be my view. I hope and wish to believe that we will live in a safer world in which I might ultimately be able to come to a different conclusion. As I said, I have not held to my position blindly but have tried to assess the evidence and have retained my position with it. However, for those reasons, much as I respect Mr Kidd, I cannot support the argument and believe that we must retain our independent deterrent.

17:23

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie (SNP)):** I thank Bill Kidd for securing the debate. He has been honoured by folk who respect his views on the matter by being nominated for the Nobel peace prize. It is just a pity that he did not get that prize.

Once again, we stand in this chamber, making the case against nuclear weapons of mass destruction. I am sure that we all agree that, for the sake of our small planet, we must find a way to disarm. What these weapons of mass destruction are designed to do is almost unimaginable to us all. We have built bombs that can reduce cities to ashes and missiles that are designed to fly thousands of miles and then split into 12 individual warheads, each containing enough destructive power to destroy all life at its target and beyond. At supersonic speeds, they tear through the sky in a trail of fire. Scientists call that wicked sight the “fingers of God”. Indeed, it seems as though those people are trying to play God.

The madness of the Trident nuclear missile programme is beyond comprehension. Nuclear bombs will never be used again—it would be mutually assured destruction. However, for me, what invokes horror is the potential for human error. Last month, we were told that a Trident missile malfunctioned because of a miscalculation caused by its engineers. History is littered with mankind’s mistakes—when arrogance overtook rationality and ignorance eclipsed sanity. We should not be so arrogant as to presume that nuclear weapons will end well; it is unwise to suppose that we can contend with such unimaginable forces.

A vast underground arsenal of nuclear warheads is stored a few miles from my constituency. In the event of human error, the consequences could be cataclysmic. My Clydebank and Milngavie constituency would be utterly eradicated in the event of a detonation, along with the whole of the central belt all the way through to Edinburgh. The aftermath of such an event would wipe out almost the entire Scottish nation, given that most of us live in the central belt.

It might seem ludicrous to stand in the Scottish Parliament and talk about a nuclear holocaust in Clydebank and beyond, but the notion of 1,000-bomber raids over Clydebank seemed eccentric before world war two. If there is radiation leak when the weapons are being driven through my constituency, thousands of people will be exposed to it, causing untold misery.

The point that I am trying to make is simply that human error is inevitable—it is just a matter of time. We must surrender the weapons before it is too late. All sides need to strive for nuclear



disarmament for the sake of our small planet. Scotland must make her voice heard. We are a nation known for our resistance to the British state's nuclear programme; we are a forward-looking and conscious people who reject those immoral weapons.

17:27

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I thank Bill Kidd for bringing the debate to the chamber and for giving me an opportunity to talk about the interests of workers in my constituency.

I respect those who believe in unilateral nuclear disarmament. I take a different view: we should negotiate to rid the world of nuclear weapons on a multilateral basis. I want to achieve global zero.

Whatever people's point of view, we need to take responsibility for those who are employed at Faslane. Here are the facts about employment at Faslane and Coulport. A freedom of information response from the Ministry of Defence in September 2014 revealed that 6,800 people are directly employed at the base by the MOD and Babcock. A Scottish Enterprise study commissioned from EKOS identified an extra 4,500 jobs in the supply chain and the local economy. That makes 11,300 jobs. Following a decision that was taken when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister to make Faslane the home of the UK's whole submarine fleet, we expect about 2,000 more jobs in the next couple of years. We are approaching 13,000 jobs in total, not 600 jobs, as the report that we are discussing would have people believe. I invite people to stand at the north and south gates of Faslane at 7 am to see the cars and buses queuing as thousands go to work—and that is just the morning shift.

Faslane is the biggest single-site employer in Scotland, providing highly skilled, well-paid jobs that account for more than a quarter of the full-time workforce in West Dunbartonshire. When we speak about renewing Trident, let us remember that we are referring to the new fleet of submarines and all the jobs that are associated with its construction, maintenance and support. Thousands of workers at Barrow depend on Trident, too. We have a naval base in my constituency because of Trident; it would serve no strategic purpose without that.

I would like to share with members the instructive observation of Derek Torrie, the trade union convener at Faslane and Coulport. In response to the report, he said:

"It is like asking how many people at Glasgow Airport directly rely on planes landing or taking off for their jobs, and then answering it is only the people who drive the tractors to move planes to the runway, or the people who wave them in with their lollipops. In reality, of course, without planes there would be no airport. It is exactly the

same at HMNB Clyde—no submarines = no base and no jobs."

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackie Baillie:** I am sorry—I do not have time.

According to GMB Scotland, the jobs impact extends to the 200 to 300 workers at BAE Systems on the Clyde who will be redeployed to Barrow to work on the new submarines while waiting for the type 26s to ramp up. We should not forget, either, the workers at Rosyth who are working on the Successor programme.

I want to touch on defence diversification. We had a defence diversification agency—it was set up by a Labour Government in the late 1990s. Unfortunately, it failed to produce anything of note. Here is what others had to say about it: in its executive council statement on 17 July 2016, Unite the Union said that defence diversification was

"a pig in a poke",

while GMB Scotland called on politicians to stop playing fast and loose with highly skilled jobs. Those are not my words, but the words of people who have a deep knowledge of the defence industry. We should listen to them.

I make a plea to members, whether they are unilateralist or multilateralist: please do not pay lip service to the workers in my constituency on jobs, and do not pretend and tell them that the number of jobs affected is smaller, because they know what the truth is.

17:31

**Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I thank Bill Kidd for lodging his motion and giving us the chance to debate this subject, as well as for all the work that he has done in campaigning for nuclear disarmament. I welcome the Jimmy Reid Foundation's report, which I think perfectly encapsulates and answers the case against Trident renewal.

Nuclear weapons are abhorrent and indiscriminate, and there is no justification for their use. When the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, it led to the death of an estimated 246,000 people, the majority of whom were civilians.

The nuclear weapons that are sitting around the world today, including at Faslane, are up to 3,000 times more powerful than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. That means that the bombs at Faslane have the power to completely incapacitate Scotland if anything were ever to go wrong at Faslane, which, as we all now know, it

very nearly did. The co-ordinator of the Peace Pledge Union said:

“The prospect of death and destruction caused by an accident is no less terrifying than the thought of it being caused deliberately”.

I entirely agree.

Morally, we simply cannot support the renewal of such weapons of mass destruction, nor should we be forced into accepting them on our own doorstep. The storage, the testing and the transporting of the weapons and their waste all put Scotland at risk on a day-to-day basis, and if anything went wrong—whether by accident or by design—the effect on our country would be absolutely catastrophic.

Let us look at the economic case against Trident renewal. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament currently puts the cost of Trident renewal at a colossal £205 billion. Even the best-case scenario estimate from the chairman of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Crispin Blunt, puts the figure at £179 billion.

This time last week, Sandra White led a debate on the women against state pension inequality campaign, which fights for the women who were born in the 1950s who have, in effect, been short-changed by the acceleration of the timetable in the Pensions Act 2011. Is Westminster making any funds available to address the serious inequality there?

Towards the end of last year, I took part in a debate on social security in which MSPs gave account after account of constituents who were suffering at the hands of Tory-imposed austerity, who included people who had been forced into starvation and illness because of sanctions and people with disabilities who were having their money reduced. Agency after agency told us about the effect that austerity and cuts to benefits and welfare was having on their members, and there were reports of people becoming increasingly ill, isolated and suicidal. We have seen the proliferation of food banks across our country, we suffer from food poverty, and an estimated 22 per cent of children living in Scotland live in poverty.

I think that that £205 billion could be better spent, and not only in the areas that I have mentioned, as it could be invested in industries—carbon capture and storage, for example, and our renewables industry—that have a real future in Scotland but which Westminster has also seen fit to cut funding for. What infuriates me most is that when it comes to war and weaponry money is never an issue and can always be found but when it comes to the poorest and most vulnerable in our society we are told about the dire straits that our economy is in and there is never any budget.

There is no such thing as a nuclear deterrent. Nuclear weapons have not stopped terrorist attacks here or elsewhere in the world; they have not prevented wars from being started and they have not helped to end them. There is also the whole hypocrisy behind all of this. How can the UK be so hypocritical as to have nuclear weapons while criticising and rallying against others who look to have them, too? The situation is preposterous.

The whole Trident renewal process and the absolutely colossal expense that goes with it are simply a means of gratifying the UK's—actually, the Westminster Government's—superiority complex. It is a dangerous vanity project that needs to be scrapped.

17:36

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I, too, congratulate and thank Bill Kidd for bringing this debate to the chamber this evening, and I also thank him for his consistent and principled stance and all the work that he does on this area.

I was pleased to take part in November's launch of the Jimmy Reid Foundation report “Trident and its Successor Programme”, and I am grateful to the authors, Mike Danson, Karen Gilmore and Geoff Whittam, for making such a clear, well-researched and well-argued case for non-renewal, employment diversification and our contribution to peace.

Parliament has previously voted with the Greens for a constitutional ban on Trident and a global ban on nuclear weapons, and I know that a majority of members believe that, even if Trident were cost free—even if there were no charge—we should continue to demand its end and removal, because it is an abomination even to consider using such weapons of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction.

Although I appreciate Jackson Carlaw's words, there is, in my view, no proportionate nuclear deterrent. For those who are not convinced by what I and others see as the strong moral and philosophical case against renewal and who cite the economic benefits of spend—I cannot call it “investment”, because I never want to see the return on nuclear weapons—we must be clear that Trident provides great benefits, but to whom? To banks, to arms suppliers and to multinational companies. The missiles themselves are American, and the report confirms that

“much of the hardware and software is reliant on imported technology”.

Trident renewal offers little to the Scottish and UK economies in the way of economic activity and multiplier effects, and reports from Oxford Economics show that better economic outcomes

could be achieved by investing in social security, for example, or our food and drink sector. The UK Government might have clearly decided to safeguard this specific area of defence, but many quality jobs in the public sector have been lost due to cuts, with the impact on those employees, their families and communities clear to see.

The impact on conventional defence forces is clear, too. Indeed, former Ministry of Defence personnel such as Lord Arbuthnot and Lord Browne now oppose renewal. Trident destroys jobs elsewhere in Scotland and the UK and prevents investment in the jobs of the future and the just transition to the sustainable low-carbon jobs that we urgently need. Real security is about having those kinds of jobs, a home and guaranteed clean drinking water.

Along with the Jimmy Reid Foundation and CND, the Campaign Against Arms Trade produces valuable research. Its 2014 report "Arms to renewables: work for the future" sets out clear examples of how a diversification agenda would be of great benefit through the creation of good-quality, secure jobs and the utilisation of the skills that we really need in our new industries. According to CAAT's research, offshore wind and marine energy could produce more jobs than the entire arms industry.

CAAT has described its vision of a "safer world" as

"one which guarantees highly skilled manufacturing jobs that will be there in the future—and"

crucially—this is really important—

"which creates the kind of future we might want to see"

and that we might want to be part of. After all, it is us who create the future that we are going to live in.

However, who is "we" when it comes to discussing Trident in general? The moral and philosophical case that the Jimmy Reid Foundation has presented makes clear the democratic deficit that is involved in ignoring the overall position of the people in Scotland towards Trident.

The Jimmy Reid Foundation's report is dedicated to Dr Alan Mackinnon and John Ainslie, who campaigned tirelessly for nuclear disarmament before their passing in 2015 and 2016 respectively. I am proud to do anything in my power to carry forward their incredible work along with colleagues in the Parliament and the millions of people across the world who want to see Governments pursue a radically different and more peaceful agenda.

17:40

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank Bill Kidd for bringing this members' business debate to the chamber.

I fully and definitely appreciate Bill Kidd's views, but the only thing that stopped the world slipping into a third world war in the 20th century was the existence of opposing nuclear powers—France, the United Kingdom and the United States on one side, and the Soviet Union on the other. The ability to destroy one's enemy but only at the cost of destroying oneself has proved to be the greatest reason against waging war on one's enemy. That prevented the cold war from turning hot.

In the 21st century, we do not face exactly the same challenges as those of the 20th century, but similar old problems are raising their heads again. A resurgent Russia is pursuing an aggressive policy against its neighbours; the Chinese are illegally gobbling up territory in the South China Sea; and rogue states continue to try constantly to get their hands on nuclear weapons so that they can threaten us and hold us to ransom.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** I think that Maurice Corry is generally developing an argument in support of the possession of nuclear weapons. What criteria would he apply to decide which countries should be allowed to have nuclear weapons and which ones should not?

**Maurice Corry:** Those that show proper control should be allowed. As the cabinet secretary probably knows, a monitoring force is in place, which is financed and supported by the major nations of the world and the major nuclear powers, to ensure that nuclear warheads are kept safely and properly guarded around the various former Soviet Union states.

**Neil Findlay:** I presume that weapons that are under "proper control" means ones that go in the correct direction when the button is pressed.

**Maurice Corry:** Everything has to be tested, and sometimes a test proves the need to change a mechanism or whatever. We cannot have total, 100 per cent perfection on that. Obviously, that is what happened in the case to which Neil Findlay refers. The weapon self-destructed. That is what it was supposed to do, and it did that perfectly.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Maurice Corry:** No, I must continue.

With 17,000 nuclear weapons in the world, no one in the chamber can know what threats will continue to emerge in the coming decades.

When I served in the Balkans—particularly in Bosnia—I was fortunate enough to liaise with the Russian brigade, and I was given some very good advice from my Russian army opposite number. He told me, “Do not drop your guard. You never know who will be in charge in my country, Russia. We admire your strong strategic nuclear defence force. Do not drop your guard.” I advise the dear members here that that is advice not to be ignored.

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** Maurice Corry articulated the case for the balance of terror, but that case was predicated on rational state actors. Does he consider that the heads of state of each of the P5 countries in the present day are rational actors?

**Maurice Corry:** I would take a certain judgment on that. Like the curate’s egg, there are good parts and there are bad parts.

Now is not the time for the United Kingdom to disarm and leave itself defenceless against the other nuclear nations or groups that could get nuclear weapons. With the cost of maintaining our nuclear deterrent running at only 6 per cent of our defence budget and 0.1 per cent of total Government spending, the cost of running that deterrent is affordable and represents an important and sensible investment in our future national security.

That is not to mention the benefits to the West Scotland region, which I represent. Our nuclear deterrent secures thousands of jobs at Faslane, which is now one of the largest employer sites in not just the west of Scotland but the whole of Scotland. With the entire fleet of submarines to be based out of Faslane in the future, the number of jobs that are sustained will go up from the current 6,800 personnel who are employed at the base to more than 8,200 by 2022.

However, we should bear it in mind that Her Majesty’s Naval Base Clyde, not the camp on the A814, is the real peace camp. The base brings with it significant economic benefit for the local communities that surround Faslane. There are also the thousands of jobs at Rosyth and on the Clyde that will be protected thanks to the construction projects of the successor submarine programme. GMB Scotland has estimated that up to 40,000 jobs in Scotland are dependent on Trident—that is a lot of people employed. The GMB Scotland secretary, Gary Smith, was right to say:

“The 40,000 defence workers in Scotland are as vital to our national security as the Armed Forces. Without the skills of the workforce in the yards on the Clyde and Rosyth the Royal Navy could not defend the Nation.”

For almost 50 years now, the United Kingdom has been kept safe thanks to the current fleet of

Vanguard submarines patrolling and maintaining our nuclear deterrent 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. Their four replacement submarines—now named the Dreadnought class—will ensure that that protection remains in place until the 2060s. It is vital for our national interest and security, the interests of our allies abroad, the safety of citizens and the thousands of people in Scotland whose jobs depend on our nuclear deterrent that we keep that deterrent in the uncertain world in which we live.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but that is where you must stop. Your argument is that we should keep Trident. That is lovely and you made—

**Maurice Corry:** I was just going to say that we must remain part of the United Kingdom—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, you have to stop. I gave you extra time for interventions.

17:46

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** After the previous speech, where do I start?

I thank my colleague Bill Kidd for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am pleased to speak on the subject of Trident because it is one of the reasons why I got involved in politics. I have been involved in politics so long that I remember the debate about Trident as a replacement for Polaris. I disagreed with having nuclear weapons then, as I do now. My old dad went to his first demonstration at Faslane at the age of 63. He came to the conclusion that there is no place in our world for such weapons of mass destruction. If an old guy like my old dad can change his mind as a pensioner, I am quite sure that there are others who will see the light with regard to the argument against Trident.

The Jimmy Reid Foundation report effectively presents the case for the non-renewal of Trident and for not having a successor programme to replace it. The report is set out in three sections that explain the moral case, the economic case and the defence case for non-renewal. For each of those three areas, the report states in no uncertain terms that renewal will negatively impact the people of our country and specifically those living in and around the west of Scotland.

Renewing Trident and continuing to fire hundreds of billions of pounds into something that we all hope we will never use, at the cost of funding projects that will benefit the community, the environment and Scotland’s economy seems bizarre to me. In Paisley, for example, local families and businesses are struggling, but Westminster thinks that it is okay to spend £205

billion on weapons that would undoubtedly affect only the very civilians who we claim we are trying to protect. That does not make sense.

The moral implications of the successor programme are extreme. The existence of nuclear weapons threatens the whole of civilisation. Unlike conventional warfare, a nuclear attack does not discriminate between hostile aggressors and innocent civilians—or, in the speak of the White House president, the good guys and the bad guys. That position directly contradicts the principles of what is known in some circles as a just war. How could we support the destruction of thousands of innocent civilians if we ever had to use those weapons?

The response to that point would no doubt be that the order for a nuclear attack would never be given. Where is the sense in spending a fortune on something that will never be used, while families are struggling financially throughout our communities? Deterrence is the rationale used by those who support nuclear weapons, but the Jimmy Reid Foundation report almost humorously renders that argument useless. Instead of creating fear and uncertainty, the non-renewal of Trident would free up massive amounts of money for public sector jobs, education, healthcare and conventional defence strategies—the list goes on. Even I cannot imagine the financial benefits that would come to Paisley and Renfrewshire alone from that.

To me, the Trident issue is simple. While Westminster covers up missile test failures costing up to £17 million each, submarine collisions in the Atlantic and breaches in submarines' fuel cladding, the fallout from a Tory hard Brexit will undoubtedly hit the poorest in my community the hardest. Given the sticky situation that the people of Scotland are already in because of something that we did not vote for, how can we support the successor programme? The people of Scotland have said on numerous occasions that they do not want it. The reported £205 billion that it will take to replace Trident will cost every UK taxpayer £3,000 a year and cost my constituency of Paisley alone £242 million. We can imagine what that money could do for Paisley or for other members' constituencies. Instead of investing in nuclear weapons, I, for one, would rather invest in the people of Scotland.

17:50

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I commend the Jimmy Reid Foundation report and I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing the debate, on his tireless campaigning on the issue and on his approach to building a cross-party coalition on the matter.

Scottish Labour has a recently confirmed policy against Trident renewal and anyone who is genuinely anti-Trident will welcome that.

There is an economic case and a defence case against renewal, but we should always begin with the moral case, which is well summed up by the former foreign minister of Australia, Gareth Evans. He said:

“The fact remains that the existence of nuclear weapons as a class of weapons threatens the whole of civilization. This is not the case with respect to any class or classes of conventional weapons. It cannot be consistent with humanity to permit the existence of a weapon which threatens the very survival of humanity.”

When we take away the smoke and mirrors, the patriotism and the difficult history that the issue has in Scotland and the UK, it comes down to this: those missiles are designed to kill on an industrial scale. That is wrong, it is repugnant and it is immoral. The answer is not simply to move them from Scotland to England; it makes no difference whether those weapons are based in Faslane, in Barrow or in the US. They are a terrifying threat wherever they are.

It is past time that we in the UK took seriously our obligations under the UN Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We cannot simply wait for Russia or the US to do it, and we should lead the way.

In November, I helped to host the initial announcement of the report by the Jimmy Reid Foundation here in Parliament. As we have heard, the report sets out the cost of Trident, the cost of getting rid of it—the economic cost, but also the personal cost to those who work with it—and the lengthy history of resistance against it.

There are some people—we have heard them—who say that getting rid of Trident would be an attack on workers, a number of whom are highly skilled, and I understand that point and have some sympathy with it. No one should lose their job due to Trident decommissioning and we must ensure that that is part of any plan. However, as the report states, 600 civilian jobs are directly dependent on the existing Trident system at Faslane and, in a civilised, 21st century society such as Scotland's, we should be able to redeploy 600 workers into suitable sectors, preferably in or around the existing base. According to the well-researched report, the remaining jobs at HMNB Clyde are for

“work on other submarines and surface ships and are not at risk.”

The report suggests setting up a Scottish defence diversification agency, as proposed by the Scottish Trades Union Congress, which would help to redeploy workers and to integrate them into new roles. This week, Unison made the point that some of our most skilled craftspeople should

have more socially and economically productive work than on the upkeep of weapons of mass destruction. If people see that a plan is in place, it is much easier to make the argument against renewal and, after this debate, anyone who wants to debate that point can do so with the authors of the report.

The UK Government estimates that renewal of Trident submarines will cost around £31 billion, but the report shows that the lifetime cost of maintenance, staffing and so on will be £205 billion. That price is not worth paying for a deterrent that simply makes us part of the international bully boy club. The economic argument for scrapping Trident seems fairly clear to me. Spending billions on renewing nuclear weapons is wrong at any time, but it is particularly wrong when vicious cuts are being unleashed on so many areas.

Reports such as this only bolster my belief that Trident should not be replaced and my resolve to fight against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Storing our own weapons of mass destruction is wrong, replacing them is wrong, and using them would be not only wrong, but reckless, despicable and immoral. I congratulate Mike Danson, Karen Gilmore and Geoff Whittam on their report, and our colleague Bill Kidd on bringing the debate to the chamber this evening.

17:54

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing the debate and thank the Jimmy Reid Foundation authors who produced the report that stimulated it. I put on record my opposition to the renewal of Trident.

Much ground has been covered in the debate, so I will focus my remarks on the question of Trident's supposed independence. Its independence is often asserted, but the assertion is both ill-informed and misleading.

Let us consider what independence means in this context. There are two aspects and the first is the concept of operational independence, whereby the UK has the ability to patrol and launch the missiles. Although it is technically plausible to claim that the UK has that ability, there are significant political complications, to which I will return later in my remarks.

The second crucial aspect of Trident's independence relates to its procurement and maintenance. Given that the missiles on British Trident submarines are part of a common pool of missiles that is shared with and maintained by the United States, it is understood that

"If the United States were to withdraw their cooperation completely, the UK nuclear capability would probably have a life expectancy measured in months rather than years."

Those are not my words, but the words of the cross-party Trident commission that was co-chaired by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Sir Menzies Campbell and Lord—formerly Des—Browne, two of whom are former UK defence secretaries.

That means, in the words of Professor Colin Gray, who was cited by the cross-party commission, that the

"British nuclear deterrent ... is hostage to American Good Will ... the dependency"

of which

"is critical".

Writing in 2014, the commission stated:

"It might be difficult today to imagine circumstances where the United States would cease to have a strong interest in the strategic survival of Europe",

but it went on to say, rather presciently, that there was a doubt

"related to the possibility that isolationist tendencies that have always existed within the United States could strengthen again ... US interests are different from British or European ones."

Given recent developments in American politics, I am sure that members will wish to reflect upon those serious points.

There are two aspects to operational independence: technical operational independence and political operational independence. Although the technical aspects of operational independence are difficult to verify from information that is in the public domain, I believe that it is possible to say something on the question of political operational independence, which is already compromised by the complete lack of independence in procurement and maintenance.

The power to authorise the launch of an armed Trident missile rests with the UK Government. The most likely scenario in which such authorization would be given is a US-led NATO strike against a nuclear-armed state aggressor. In such a scenario UK participation would be not only tokenistic but strategically unnecessary. The UK does not impact upon the strategic balance and it can be argued that, from a NATO perspective, resources would be better deployed on conventional forces, such as for anti-submarine warfare in the north Atlantic.

The UK's membership of NATO vitiates the argument of deterrence, given that the US is the effective nuclear guarantor of article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The final argument adduced in favour of Trident is one described by the cross-party commission as "future circumstances in which"

the UK faces

“a strategic threat where the extended US nuclear deterrent is under question, but in which the United States would not obstruct the UK exercising its independent operation.”

Such a situation is all but impossible to conceive, but there is a useful historical example to demonstrate how such a scenario could play out. During the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy stated:

“It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.”

In making that statement, Kennedy made it clear that the Soviet Union would not be able to limit the theatre of any nuclear exchange to North America and the Caribbean. Any launch from Cuba would be regarded as an aggressive act by not just Cuba but the USSR.

Were an aggressor nation to be faced with the threat of a unilateral nuclear strike from the UK, in the face of annihilation it would have nothing to lose in stating that it would regard any such action as an attack by NATO and the United States. The cross-party commission notes:

“extended nuclear deterrence is inherently problematic ... requiring the sponsor”—

in this case the United States—

“to risk their own cities’ destruction to protect an ally whose actions they may not agree with”.

It is clear that, if such a scenario were to transpire, the United States would do all that it could to obstruct a unilateral British strike and would make the pressure applied to the UK during the Suez crisis pale in comparison.

Unfortunately time limits me, but I hope that with my remarks I have succeeded in convincing some members that it is simply not sustainable to describe the UK’s nuclear deterrent as “independent”.

17:59

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I, too, thank Bill Kidd for lodging his motion. I fear that we will come to the matter from different angles, but I am grateful for the chance to discuss it.

My thought process on nuclear weapons goes back to the 1980s, when I was a soldier in the British Army in the Rhine. We were deployed there to prevent the incursion of the Russian Army and we were outnumbered by six to one; in fact, the Russian Third Echelon troops alone outnumbered our entire force. Our job out there was to form a bridge to stop the Russians coming in and to wait

for air support from the USA. We would have needed to delay them for five days, for which we had a plan based on holding them at the Fulda Gap. At that stage, the Russians knew that our plan was to hold them there, and their plan was to get us out of the way as quickly as possible. We practised in nuclear, biological and chemical warfare so that we would be able to defend against anything that they threw at us. As horrific as it might seem—I agree that such things are abhorrent—we had to be prepared. We knew that if we delayed the Russians for anything like four days, the response would be nuclear or chemical weapons to get rid of us.

At that stage, the UK had approximately 560 nuclear weapons spread between battlefield nuclear weapons, which were Lance missiles, tactical nuclear weapons, which were airborne missiles, and strategic deterrent in the form of submarines. That is a lot of nuclear weapons and it was, and is, a frightening thought.

I was therefore delighted when, in 1991, Boris Yeltsin came to power and we saw the end of the cold war. We started to knock back the number of nuclear weapons. In fact, we knocked back so considerably that the figure dropped to 180 nuclear weapons. When we get to the successor programme, we will go down to 120 nuclear weapons. That is a 79 per cent reduction in the number of nuclear weapons that we have. No other country in the world has reduced nuclear weapons to that level.

If any member had wanted to interrupt me there, I would have taken an intervention because there is actually one such country: Ukraine. Overseen by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe on 5 December 1994, Ukraine signed the Budapest memorandum, when it agreed that it would unilaterally give up all its nuclear weapons and rely on the Soviet Union or America to protect it. As we know, that did not happen.

**Tom Arthur:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Edward Mountain:** I am sorry, but my time is so short. I might in a moment, if I can develop my point a bit more.

At the moment, our army of 82,000, with an American army of 535,000 has fewer soldiers in the field than North Korea. In fact, North Korea has 1.7 million soldiers in arms and 7.7 million soldiers in reserve. China has 2.8 million regulars and goodness knows how many reserves—just about all of them could become reserves. The Russian army has 771,000 regulars and 2 million reserves.

It is therefore right that we should have an ultimate deterrent. To me, the argument that we should not have one is not right: it is about how we

manage it. The argument is about whether we should have three or four boats. I believe that three boats would be sufficient and that, at 4 per cent to 5 per cent of the UK defence budget, the running costs are perfectly manageable.

**Tom Arthur:** Will the member give way?

**Edward Mountain:** I am sorry but I am running out of time. I do not believe that Trident is a dangerous weapon. I have guarded nuclear weapons and I know the care that is taken of them. I therefore support having nuclear weapons as a weapon of very last resort and ultimate deterrent. I believe that to give that up would be extremely dangerous.

18:03

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank Bill Kidd for bringing the debate. He is a consistent campaigner and someone who seeks to build bridges on this issue.

I say to Edward Mountain that the idea of a nuclear weapon that is not dangerous is a novel concept to me.

Politics is about debating the big issues of the day—hearing counterarguments and attempting to influence people and win them over to a position through strength of argument. This is one of the big issues. For those of us who are opposed to Trident renewal, that is our task. In Parliament, the Scottish Labour Party, the SNP and the Green Party are opposed to Trident renewal. The political task for us should now be to convince others. I want the Liberals to be on board and, as a socialist, I am always an optimist, so I urge the Tories to join us in opposition to Trident renewal. However, if Rona Mackay thinks that her speech is the way to bring people together and grow a coalition against Trident, she might want to reconsider.

We will not build that coalition through moral indignation. The argument will be won when we are able to address defence, economic and other concerns head on and can reassure those who are worried and who will be directly affected, whether they be workers on the Clyde, business owners around Faslane or people who are fearful about the country's defences. We need to convince those people that we have the answers to those fears.

The arguments are there to be won. The military argument grows weaker by the day. Now, ex-generals, field marshals including Lord Bramall, and General Ramsbottom say that changes in international politics make Trident an irrelevance.

**Edward Mountain:** I very much take the point that there are some military generals who might argue against Trident. However, none of the

people who have been mentioned have been regular soldiers—actually serving—within the past five years. Has Neil Findlay got an example of someone from the past five years who would support his argument?

**Neil Findlay:** The people whom I mentioned have operated at the very highest levels of the armed forces, and former defence secretaries of all parties are also coming on board. There is a growing case against Trident, and the military argument grows weaker. Major General Patrick Cordingley, who led British forces in the first Gulf war, said:

“Strategic nuclear weapons have no military use. It would seem the government wishes to replace Trident simply to remain a nuclear power alongside the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council. This is misguided and flies in the face of public opinion; we have more to offer than nuclear bombs.”

The people whom I have mentioned identify cybercrime, climate change and terrorism as the main threats to our security. It is on those issues that any defence investment should be focused.

For me, the jobs argument is one of the most important remaining arguments that we have to nail. In this debate, the workers and communities who are affected by Trident are a key consideration: we want them to join us in the cause of disarmament. We have to give assurances to local supply-chain companies, small businesses, engineers, technicians and fabricators that we have a genuine plan to create new jobs for every worker—not imaginary jobs, but jobs with a guaranteed future. With £205 billion, surely we can do that. It cannot be beyond the wit of woman and man to use that eye-watering sum of money for things that will benefit humanity and not—if the weapons were ever to be used—destroy it.

According to the Scottish Parliament information centre, around 15,000 jobs across the UK are associated with Trident, and the Jimmy Reid Foundation paper says that the figure is 11,000 jobs—a mix of direct jobs, supply-chain jobs and jobs in local associated services. Using those figures, we can say that every job costs between £14 million and £18 million. As a job creation scheme, that does not represent good value for money over the lifetime of the contract—leaving aside the fact that we are talking about something that we hope never to use, because using it would wipe out the human race.

I welcome the Jimmy Reid Foundation report as a contribution to the debate. I look forward to a world that is free of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. I believe that all of us in here want to live in peace and solidarity with our fellow human beings.



18:08

**Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I thank Bill Kidd for bringing this issue to the chamber.

Times have changed since the cold war. The UK Government's own national security strategy identifies terrorism, cyber-warfare and natural disasters as greater threats to national security than nuclear warfare. However, the UK Government still wants to renew Trident, even though it knows fine well that it is outdated and ineffective in the face of those major threats to global security.

Not only does Trident fail to enhance our security in the 21st century, it fundamentally undermines it. If the UK can argue that Trident is essential for its security, can other states not reach the same logical conclusion? The UK's refusal to give up Trident shows a blatant disregard for the principles of the non-proliferation treaty to which it is a signatory.

There is clearly a strong moral and ethical case against nuclear weapons. Their use can never satisfy the principles of just war theory, because of their disproportionate force and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. Let me put it into perspective: the destructive power of one Trident missile is estimated to be the equivalent of eight Hiroshimas, and each of the UK's four nuclear submarines carries 16 Trident missiles. We know that Trident is both powerful and indiscriminate. If it was used, it would kill millions of innocent men, women and children, and it would affect the health of future generations.

One issue that we face in the Highlands is the storing and transporting of nuclear material. That should be a lesson to us all not to burden and endanger future generations with the decisions that we make today. Right now in the Highlands, we have US Air Force cargo planes transporting weapons-grade uranium from Dounreay on the north coast to the US. The material came to Scotland for safe storage from behind the iron curtain at the end of the cold war. Last year, David Cameron did a deal with President Obama; now, we are sending that material to Trump. Although many people in the constituency are very glad to see it go and not to have the burden of keeping it safe for the next 100,000 years, many have expressed concerns about safety and security, particularly as the airport runway is too short for such a big plane to take off from, so refuelling at a base in Moray is needed before that particular cargo crosses the Atlantic.

The extraordinary cost of Trident diverts resources from conventional defence. In Scotland, all the investment is being stripped out and, with the closure of Fort George in the Highlands, we

will be left with no personnel. Sure, some will visit us to use the bombing ranges, and the deeply unpopular nuclear submarine will still go up and down our coast, disrupting our fishermen.

Like Tom Arthur, I wonder whether our independent nuclear deterrent is really independent. The debacle of the recent failed test showed us that, because of US Government involvement, the people of the United States are better informed about Trident than we are. Polls have consistently shown that the majority of Scots oppose Trident, and the Scottish Parliament and most political parties in Scotland oppose Trident. There is a fundamental issue of democracy here.

In summary, Trident diverts resources, it is ineffective, it is immoral, it is dangerous, it is not independent, and we do not want it. Let us not have it.

18:12

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** As ever in the chamber we have heard informed and passionate debate against Trident, as well as its successor programme, and indeed against all nuclear weapons. Like others, I commend Bill Kidd for again bringing the matter for debate in the chamber. I echo his words to those in the public gallery today and to those who have been involved in the report, which very effectively demolishes the arguments of Jackie Baillie and her claims for jobs dependent on the successor programme.

We have had something of a minimax thing. On the one hand, we have heard Jackson Carlaw minimising the cost, I believe, referring to it as being 20p in every £100—and then quietly adding that that is over the next 40 years. It is a hard way to try and describe £205 billion and what that means to people. We have heard the maximisation argument from Jackie Baillie, referring to jobs—not just the number of jobs but the idea that jobs are the argument. She made one or two introductory comments about multilateralism, as she usually does, and then her speech was all about jobs. There is no way on earth, as Alison Johnstone and others have said, that we can justify expenditure of £205 billion on the number of jobs that are said to be dependent.

Above all, as has been said, the main opposing argument is that nuclear weapons are morally wrong. They are morally wrong for a number of reasons, in particular their indiscriminate nature. It is not possible to launch a strike with nuclear weapons and restrict it to those we would see as being our enemy without taking in huge numbers of civilian and, often, innocent populations. They are indiscriminate, and they are devastating in their impact.

Given that, it was interesting when I asked Maurice Corry which countries should be allowed to have such weapons and he replied:

“Those that show proper control”.

I am sure that, if he thinks about it a bit longer, he will quickly think of countries that could quite conceivably have “proper control”—whatever he means by that—over nuclear weapons but which he would not want to see anywhere near having nuclear weapons. The point that I was trying to make was: how do we decide who is deserving and who is responsible enough to have nuclear weapons, and who is not? If we cannot do that, it is hypocritical to say that we can have them but others cannot.

Nuclear weapons are extremely expensive, and there are consequences of that expense in terms of opportunities forgone. Many members have mentioned social programmes, but we can even just restrict it to the military aspects, I met senior military figures this afternoon, and they were talking about the cuts to defence services—cuts that have taken place over many years. P45s were seen being handed out to soldiers in Afghanistan who were on active duty. Soldiers in Afghanistan had also told them that the regiments from Scotland that they had joined were being abolished or merged. Those are the effects of the cuts. Those are the opportunity costs, even if we just restrict them to the military, of expenditure on Trident and nuclear weapons. That is one of the reasons why, as Neil Findlay said, so many former serving personnel, who have to be quite quiet about what they say, and senior political figures who have been involved in defence have now said that it is not worth the candle in many different ways.

As members will know, in July last year the UK Government voted in favour of the Trident successor programme despite all but one Scottish MP voting against renewal. As members will also be aware, in January this year *The Sunday Times* led with a story that there had been a misfire of a Trident test missile one month before that vote, which the UK Government chose not to disclose. There was a light-hearted exchange about missiles going off in the wrong direction, but we should just think about the consequences had that missile had warheads on it and been fired in anger. Think about the consequences. It could quite easily have come back on to the very people we were seeking to defend in deploying it against somebody else.

**Edward Mountain:** In fairness—I know that the cabinet secretary has military experience, exactly as I do—it is true that all weapons will, at some stage, misfire. The whole point is that there are fail-safe mechanisms in place for any weapon—apart from small arms—that allow the missile to be

detonated to get rid of it. In the incident to which the cabinet secretary refers, the missile did not have a nuclear weapon on top of it—the MOD was simply testing the missile system. Will he accept that missiles sometimes go wrong and that it is important to test them?

**Keith Brown:** Of course I accept that; there are lengthy processes for testing weapons of all different descriptions. I am talking about the consequences. If an SA80 rifle misfires, that will do damage to the person who is firing it. If a Trident nuclear missile misfires, the consequences are felt by hundreds of thousands, or millions, of people. It is a question of scale, and the reports to which I referred are deeply worrying.

**Christina McKelvie:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Keith Brown:** I will.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I suspect that you have to, cabinet secretary. [*Laughter.*]

**Christina McKelvie:** Thank you, Presiding Officer, and cabinet secretary for taking the intervention.

I have pursued the issue of nuclear testing for 10 years with numerous Governments, be they Labour or Tory. When will the UK Government abide by the rules, take responsibility and compensate the nuclear test veterans who were used as guinea pigs at Christmas Island? People have been genetically modified: they have lost children and have had all sorts of health conditions because of those tests, which were done without any real oversight. The UK Government needs to take responsibility for those people.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was a long intervention, Ms McKelvie, and not absolutely on point.

**Christina McKelvie:** The cabinet secretary will not mind.

**Keith Brown:** I entirely agree with the member.

The tests to which I referred were not disclosed to Parliament—that is the important point. All previous missile tests were publicised by the MOD, and it is of serious concern that the information about the misfire incident was not disclosed before the vote on Trident. Even now, the Secretary of State for Defence refuses to confirm or deny that such an incident took place. I do not know whether he realises how foolish that makes him look, given that the information is readily available to people in the United States. He did not confirm that the incident took place when he was called to account in the House of Commons. He simply stated:

“we have absolute confidence in ... our independent nuclear deterrent”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 23 January 2017; Vol 778, c 463.]

I do not think that that is the case; Tom Arthur gave a very good speech on the putative independence of the system. The refusal to acknowledge the incident is unacceptable, and the Scottish Government calls for full disclosure from the UK Government.

As we have heard, there are various estimates of the figures involved. Crispin Blunt, a Conservative MP, mentioned a figure of £180 billion, and others have referred to a cost of £205 billion. Replacing Trident will lead to billions of pounds being wasted, and that is money that could be better spent elsewhere.

One of the most compelling arguments is the one that was made by Maree Todd and others. This Parliament has had a number of votes over the past six years in which it has clearly expressed its opposition to the basing of such weapons in this country. We have also had 58—or maybe 57—of the 59 MPs from Scotland voting against it. That is a pretty explicit expression of the will of the people of Scotland.

Worse than that is the fact that the weapons are based here in this country. The consequences of a rogue missile or a test that goes wrong will be felt here. This week, the MOD said that it has looked at whether the weapons should be based in Devonport and has ruled that out because it is not safe enough for the local population. What does that say to people in west-central Scotland? Jackson Carlaw is shaking his head, but maybe he has an answer.

What does it say about the relative value that is put on the lives and livelihoods of people in west-central Scotland that, specifically on 7 November, the MOD announced that there will be a 20 per cent reduction in the defence estate in Scotland? Those cuts will have far-reaching economic and social impacts. For example, as the report highlights, the removal of the Army from Fort George, near Inverness, after a 200-year history in that area will result in more than 700 job losses and approximately a £20 million loss of income to the local economy.

The report also questions the impact—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will have to close, I am afraid.

**Keith Brown:** —on jobs. As Neil Findlay and others have said, that is a very real concern, although the report that has been produced goes in some detail into the possibility that those jobs can be safeguarded. We have a strong system of business support available through Scottish Enterprise and other organisations to make sure that diversification can happen.

Finally, I would like to stress to the chamber that the Royal Navy and its personnel have the full support of the Scottish Government, as we support all our armed forces and their highly professional and skilled personnel. Our opposition remains to the possession, the threat and the use of a weapon system that is strategically and economically wrong, and whose use would bring unspeakable humanitarian suffering and widespread environmental damage. The Scottish Government therefore continues its commitment to the safe and complete withdrawal of Trident from Scotland. We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to cancel its plans for the renewal of Trident, and we will continue to do so.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate. I thank all members for their contributions in the debate, and I close this meeting.

*Meeting closed at 18:22.*



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