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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Communities, Social Security and Equalities

Universal Credit (Rent Arrears)

1. Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reports that every tenant in homeless accommodation in the Highlands is in rent arrears following the roll-out of universal credit by the Department for Work and Pensions. (S5O-00797)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): The roll-out of universal credit is indeed causing unacceptable levels of anxiety, hardship and rent arrears. In particular, the six-week wait for the first payment, which I know is turning out to be even longer in areas like Inverness, is pushing people into crisis and resulting in significant rent arrears for local authorities and landlords. That is why the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities has written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions requesting a halt to the roll-out of full-service universal credit until those problems are fully resolved by the United Kingdom Government.

Maree Todd: I am delighted to hear that the Scottish Government has asked for a halt to the roll-out of universal credit, as it is clearly damaging my constituents and pushing them into poverty—we are seeing record rent arrears of £900. Does the minister agree that the universal credit system must be paused until the UK Government resolves the issue of it being a minimum of six weeks before someone gets their first payment, which for a low-income family can mean the difference between heating and eating?

Jeane Freeman: I certainly do agree with that. Again, we have a UK Government pursuing a policy regardless of its negative and damaging impact on people's lives. It is simply a disgrace that in pursuing that policy, the UK Government is continuing to fail to address the weaknesses in the policy and in its delivery. Many issues, such as the six-week delay, which I find totally unacceptable, were identified by the Westminster Work and Pensions Committee, are being investigated by the Scottish Parliament's Social Security

Committee and have been raised by local authorities and the Local Government Association. Again, however, the UK Government is not listening, which is why I suspect Frank Field, the chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, has accused the Government of having its "head in the sand". Again, we are having to urge the UK Government to address those issues immediately.

I am very glad to accept the invitation to meet Ms Todd, Drew Henry MP and local partners in Inverness to discuss the difficulties facing their constituents.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the minister's answer and I agree that the roll-out of universal credit must be halted. However, halting the roll-out will not stop the hardship that families in East Lothian and Inverness are experiencing. I hope that the minister will extend discretionary housing payments to stem the problem in those areas and that she will send the bill to Damian Green.

Stopping the roll-out will undoubtedly impact on the use of our flexibilities here in Scotland. Last week, Engender called on the Scottish Government to review its proposals because

"the draft regulations do not meet their intended objective."

With no set implementation date for the housing payment flexibilities and that date potentially being put back further, will the minister come forward with regulations to deliver split payments, so that we can be sure to use those flexibilities to deliver the gender equality that is sorely lacking in the current Tory system?

Jeane Freeman: I have to say that I admire the member's optimism that we would pay for something and send a bill to the UK Government with any expectation at all that it would be paid back. We are already committed to £116 million a year from the Scottish Government to mitigate the very worst effects of the UK Government's welfare cuts.

In terms of the implementation dates and the point that the member made with regard to Engender, we have already said that we are considering actively how to implement our commitment to deliver on split payments. Indeed, Engender is involved in that discussion. The consultation on the regulations on flexibility was simply on the two aspects of fortnightly payments and the payment of rent direct to social and private landlords, and we will rely on the DWP to deliver those. Along with calling for a halt to the implementation and roll-out of universal credit, we will begin discussions with the DWP on how it will implement our flexibilities and we will continue our discussions with Engender and other organisations on exactly the criteria that we could reasonably use to implement the delivery of split

payments. I will, of course, inform the Parliament and the Social Security Committee when we have reached that decision.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Part of helping homeless people is to ensure that they have not only houses but also jobs available for them. Under the Scottish National Party, long-term unemployment has more than doubled, to nearly 50,000 people. What action is the Scottish Government taking to help those in long-term unemployment to find work and thus reduce their dependence on welfare?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That is not quite the minister's brief, but perhaps she will answer very briefly.

Jeane Freeman: I am more than happy to do so. Of course, Mr Mountain will also know that, as far as youth unemployment is concerned, Scotland now has one of the best records in Europe—next only to Germany and certainly much further ahead than the rest of the UK.

Our actions in helping those moving from unemployment to employment of course include our devolved employment programmes, in which, by not applying sanctions, we are absolutely confident that we will have greater success than is currently the case—without the hardship, misery and anxiety imposed on those who have to go through the UK Government's employment programmes. In addition, our job grant proposal—it is a manifesto commitment; we will come forward with the implementation details in the near future—will help those individuals. Without pre-empting a later question, I say to Mr Mountain that if the UK Government would do the right thing on housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds, we might indeed have fewer people who are homeless.

Children Living in Poverty

2. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to raise the incomes of families with children living in poverty. (S5O-00798)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government is committed to maximising incomes and tackling poverty and inequality. That is why we have taken a number of actions to help low-income households, in the face of the United Kingdom Government's austerity agenda and welfare cuts.

Let me give the member—and the chamber—some specific examples. We are investing massively in childcare and early years. The total benefit to families from the commitment of 1,140 hours of funded entitlement is estimated to be worth over £4,500 a year per child. We are also providing free school meals for all children in

primary 1 to primary 3, saving families around £380 per child per year. We are maintaining our commitment to support people in Scotland affected by United Kingdom Government welfare cuts, via the Scottish welfare fund—mitigating the bedroom tax—and the council tax reduction scheme, which together provide substantial support to tens of thousands of families every year. In addition, our "Fairer Scotland Action Plan" sets out 50 concrete actions that we will take over the course of this session of Parliament to tackle poverty and inequality.

Colin Smyth: Last week, it was revealed that child poverty in Scotland is on the increase, with 40,000 more kids falling into poverty. Despite that rise, the First Minister failed to mention the word "poverty" once in her conference speech at the weekend. Today, we will spend two minutes talking about child poverty as opposed to the two days for which we will have been debating the possibility of another independence referendum. Will the cabinet secretary use those two minutes today to commit the Scottish Government to real positive action that will make a difference, by supporting calls by the Child Poverty Action Group to widen the scope of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill to allow for a £240 per year rise in child benefit this year, taking tens of thousands of children out of poverty? This Parliament has the powers to help to tackle child poverty. Will the cabinet secretary use them?

Angela Constance: This cabinet secretary has been working to eradicate child poverty all her political life. It is to be regretted that there was very little comment last week from the Opposition on the truly shocking rise in child poverty that we are seeing in Scotland—and, indeed, across the UK—in a country as rich as ours. It is purely unacceptable for us to have one in four of our children—that is 260,000 children—in Scotland living in relative poverty. As part of our programme for government, we are in the process of introducing the fundamentally important Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, which is all about eradicating child poverty in this country.

With regard to Colin Smyth's point about child benefit, I have said on many occasions in the chamber that as we proceed with the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill and our new social security powers, we must discuss and debate with, and challenge, each other on what more we can do with the powers and resources that we have. I do not aspire to close down any aspect of that debate.

If we are to be successful in turning round the child poverty situation in this country, we must ensure that we get more support to those in need. The Labour Party's proposal would cost £225 million each year, and £7 out of every £10 would

be spent on children who are not living in poverty. As a Government, we have to proceed by getting more support to those children who are in most need, using the new powers that we have and working towards our very ambitious targets on affordable housing.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary comment on the potential impact on those women with families on low incomes who rely on child benefit, given that they will now be asked by the UK Government to prove that they have been raped in order to get payments for a third child?

Angela Constance: We are fundamentally opposed to that policy, which is, to be frank, inhumane and irrational. Indeed, I will go further and say that I consider the policy to be barbaric. We remain deeply concerned about the impact of the policy on low-income families, many of whom are already feeling the effects on their income of other so-called welfare reforms.

To be clear, no acceptable process can ever be put in place that involves a woman being forced to disclose that she has been raped in order to access social security support for her child. Many organisations have said likewise, and their experience in the field should be heeded.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I associate myself and my party with a number of the remarks that the cabinet secretary made in response to Colin Smyth's question.

The Life Chances Act 2010 requires UK ministers to report on the number of children who are living in workless households. As we know,

“work is the best route out of poverty”.

Those are not my words, but the words of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Why, therefore, does the Scottish Government's Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill not include a similar provision for Scotland?

Angela Constance: Adam Tomkins needs to recognise that although work is imperative, it has to pay. The scandalous and shocking figures that were published last week show that the proportion of poor children who live in working households has now reached 70 per cent. It is quite clear that, in this country, work is not paying.

Despite evidence of economic growth, we are seeing no real rise in wages. Although there are many different measurements of poverty, and child poverty in particular, we have to galvanise action around the fact that income—or lack of it—is the biggest driver of poverty. We all know that to be true.

That is why, in the face of a Conservative Government that has scrapped statutory income

targets, we have embarked on a journey to reintroduce targets and make them more ambitious than the targets that the Conservatives scrapped. Given the rise in child poverty in Scotland and across the UK, it is perhaps not surprising that the Tory Government scrapped the targets, in order to sweep child poverty under the carpet.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Most of Scotland will have been horrified last week to see the increase in child poverty. While the role of failed Tory austerity in a lot of that child poverty does not escape me, the important point is what we do about it—that is what people want to see.

The previous Labour Government lifted more than 200,000 children in Scotland, and more than 1 million children in the United Kingdom, out of poverty by introducing tax credits. The cabinet secretary might want to take a targeted approach to child poverty and has argued that the Child Poverty Action Group's idea of £5 on child benefit would not do that. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to look at increasing tax credits and at targeting funding through free school meals. There are a number of ways to target funding.

We need to work together on this. Is the cabinet secretary willing to work across the Parliament to tackle the unacceptable blight of child poverty in Scotland?

Angela Constance: I am more than willing to work across the Parliament and across local and national government and civic Scotland to address the absolute scandal of child poverty in a country as rich as ours. With kindness, I remind Mr Rowley that—if my memory serves me correctly—the Labour Party actually voted against free school meals. He raises an interesting point about the Labour Government's use of tax credits from 1997 to the early 2000s. Labour made progress on child poverty before the figures then stagnated.

There is indeed more to be done. We should have a sense of urgency and of impetus. I remind Mr Rowley that, unfortunately, we do not have powers over tax credits. We will always look at what more we can do, but the reality is that with 15 per cent of welfare spend, we cannot make up for all the unfairness in the remaining 85 per cent. The Government is investing heavily in childcare and early learning. We have a new £29 million programme that is looking at tackling poverty, a commitment to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes and of course 50 very concrete actions, as set out in our “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”.

Although I am absolutely open to scrutiny, we should all examine our hearts closely to look at what more we should be doing, and I sometimes wish that the members on the Labour benches

would point the finger a bit more at that lot on the Tory benches.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We have spent a lot of time on the early questions. Can we have brief questions and briefer answers, too, please?

Social Housing

3. **James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the provision of social housing. (S5O-00799)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): The provision of social housing is and will remain a priority for the Government. We are committed to maintaining and expanding our social housing stock as part of creating a fairer society. To do that, we have clearly set out our ambition by committing over £3 billion-worth of funding for the delivery of 50,000 affordable homes in the current session of Parliament. Of those, 35,000 will be for social housing, which is an increase of 75 per cent on our previous social rented target, which as we know was not only achieved but exceeded.

James Kelly: A recent reply to Alex Rowley MSP said that there has been slow progress towards the Scottish Government's target of achieving 35,000 social rented properties, with only 6,000 forecast to be completed. Given that backdrop, it was something of a surprise to find out last week at the Finance and Constitution Committee, when Derek Mackay presented evidence on the spring budget revision, that there is an underspend of £20 million in the housing budget, which has been allocated elsewhere. If the minister thinks that housing is a priority, does he not agree that that is an outrage and that he should seek even at this late stage to reverse the decision and ensure that the £20 million is spent in this financial year?

Kevin Stewart: I think that Mr Kelly was at the Finance and Constitution Committee on Wednesday 15 March, when that matter was discussed. We have had a healthy and encouraging start to the programme, with a rise of over 20 per cent in new-build starts of affordable homes approved in 2016. The figure of £20 million that Mr Kelly quoted relates to money from the affordable homes supply programme that was given back to the capital departmental expenditure limit to be redistributed, with the understanding that it would be reallocated to the AHSP at a later date.

To reiterate, we have committed £3 billion of resource over the course of this session of Parliament. If Mr Kelly is looking for scandals, the biggest scandal is that, in the last term of the

Labour-Liberal coalition, it managed to build a total of only six council houses in Scotland.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): What investment will the Scottish Government make in social housing in South Lanarkshire over this parliamentary session and how many social housing homes will that provide?

Kevin Stewart: The Scottish Government will make available more than £35 million to South Lanarkshire Council in 2016-17 and 2017-18 for the delivery of its affordable housing priorities. It will be used to deliver an estimated 600 completed homes for social rent over those two years.

We know that councils need as much notice as possible of their full resource planning assumptions for 2018-19 and beyond, which is why later this year the Scottish Government will bring forward for councils a new offer of resource planning assumptions to March 2021.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): It is interesting to hear how much money is going to South Lanarkshire. What is the minister doing to ensure that money goes to smaller housing associations not just in South Lanarkshire but across the country?

Kevin Stewart: I know that Graham Simpson has asked similar questions before. What I want to see across the country is co-operation between all partners to deliver the 50,000 affordable homes. As Mr Simpson is well aware, I have been looking at councils' strategic housing investment plans and looking very closely at the involvement that community-based housing associations have in delivery. I said to the Local Government and Communities Committee that I would report back to it after analysis of those SHIPs was complete and I intend to do that. I will endeavour to let Mr Simpson know exactly what the situation on community-based housing associations is at that point.

Volunteering

4. **Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages volunteering in communities. (S5O-00800)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government recognises the vital contributions that volunteers make to communities across Scotland, and we provide a range of support to enable people to participate on issues that matter to them. Our £1.1 million volunteer support fund provides for community-level grants to create new or enhanced volunteering projects and to increase the diversity of volunteers, and we provide £800,000 to Volunteer Scotland to develop, promote and

enhance volunteering across Scotland. In addition, the £8.4 million that is provided through Scotland's third sector interfaces and Voluntary Action Scotland includes support for volunteer development.

Edward Mountain: As the Scottish Government knows, the volunteering rate in the Highlands is well above the national average. In 2015, nearly 77,000 people in the Highlands volunteered through an organisational group. Interestingly, more women than men volunteered. Does the Scottish Government support Highlands and Islands Enterprise and its investment in projects such as project trust in Argyll, which encourages volunteering opportunities? How will it use information from the Highlands to roll out what is being achieved there across Scotland?

Angela Constance: It is true that the volunteering rate is higher in rural areas than it is in urban areas. The volunteering rate in rural areas is 65 per cent, compared with 49 per cent in urban areas. Highlands and Islands Enterprise does a stellar amount of work on supporting social enterprise and volunteering in its part of the world.

Third Sector Interface Model (Funding 2017-18)

5. **Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when details of funding for the third sector interface model for the 2017-18 financial year will be finalised. (S5O-00801)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): Third sector interfaces, such as Voluntary Action Shetland, had their funding protected at the 2016-17 level for the first quarter of 2017-18. With a draft Scottish budget published in December 2016, we wanted to ensure that third sector organisations had sufficient time to plan and discuss their work for the next financial year. A further offer of grant funding for the remainder of 2017-18 will be issued shortly.

Tavish Scott: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply and the letter that she wrote to me on the needs of Voluntary Action Shetland, which is doing important work in this area. Does she accept that the point that she has made—about funding for one quarter—demonstrates the challenge regarding long-term staff contracts and providing services over a period of time? Will she undertake to at least explore the possibility of moving back to three-year funding, which would be inordinately helpful not just for Voluntary Action Shetland but for voluntary organisations more generally?

Angela Constance: Yes, I accept the substance of Mr Scott's question. On the funding for the next financial year, we hope to have issued grant funding by the end of April or the beginning

of May. We are glad to have been able to protect the overall third sector budget at £24.5 million. Mr Scott's point about the need to move to three-year rolling funding is well made. He will have noted that we have made progress on that with the equality budget. We will be looking to extend that to other areas where the third sector benefits, in line with our manifesto commitment.

Highlands and Islands Devolution

6. **Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what powers and responsibilities have been devolved to Highlands and Islands communities in the last 10 years. (S5O-00802)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Empowering communities has always been a focus of this Government. We want to strengthen communities' voices in the decisions that matter to them and to empower people to take forward the solutions that can make a difference to the communities where they live and work.

Our Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides communities with new rights to participate in community planning and make participation requests. It also introduces provisions on asset transfer to make it easier for communities to take over public sector property for the benefit of their communities.

Our community choice programme also enables communities in the Highlands and Islands and across Scotland to make decisions on local spending priorities.

We want to continue to improve the relationship between citizens, communities and councils, which is why our programme for government set out our commitment to review the roles and responsibilities of local government.

Kate Forbes: A number of communities in my constituency are using the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to do everything from building houses to building hydro schemes, health centres and schools. What analysis is the Scottish Government doing of the act's success, and how is it helping communities make the most of the act?

Kevin Stewart: I am always interested to see communities thrive and use the 2015 act to their benefit. I am particularly pleased to hear about community hydro schemes; there is a very successful one in my constituency at Donside Village.

The Scottish Government will keep under review the different parts of the 2015 act in order to look at the impact on improving outcomes for people and communities across Scotland. The part of the

act on participation requests comes into play on 1 April. I will keep a close eye on what is happening across the country to see where participation requests are being utilised. That will show whether a council is already engaging well with its communities, but Miss Forbes can be assured that we will continue to analyse and review every aspect of the act.

Planning System Review

7. Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making on improvements to the planning system, in light of the review of the Scottish planning system. (S5O-00803)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Following extensive stakeholder engagement, we published a consultation paper in January inviting views on our 20 proposals for change. The consultation is open until 4 April and, since January, we have held a number of engagement events and public drop-in sessions around the country and have engaged with a large number of stakeholders on our proposals.

I hope that everyone will take the opportunity to make their views known, and I look forward to seeing the responses.

Gordon Lindhurst: Yesterday, the Scottish Government announced that a decision on the proposed Pentland film studio on the outskirts of Edinburgh would not be affected by the purdah rule that is in place for the local government elections in May. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that that decision will be made before the elections, or is it another delaying tactic by a Government that is scared to make what should be a local decision before a local election?

Kevin Stewart: I thank Mr Lindhurst for the promotion; it is news to me that I am now a cabinet secretary.

Mr Lindhurst and other members should know that it is not the job of the planning minister to speak in the chamber about live planning applications. We received the report on the Pentland film studio from the reporter on 22 December, just prior to the Christmas and new year holidays, and officials have been looking at it in the meantime. A decision will be taken after it has been analysed.

Social Security Delivery

8. Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on 72 per cent of respondents to its consultation on social security in Scotland believing that it should aim to deliver social security through already

available public sector services and organisations. (S5O-00804)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): Although it is true that 72 per cent of respondents to our consultation said that social security should be available through public sector services, 84 per cent also stated that the social security agency should deliver all the devolved benefits. That shows that the people who responded, in more than 500 written responses and in the many meetings and discussions that I attended with individuals and organisations, know there is a variety of models that need to be assessed. In the spring, I expect to announce a preferred model for the social security agency, and that decision will draw on evidence from a detailed options appraisal exercise as well as the responses to the social security consultation. We will hold true to our commitment that the social security system will be consistent and person-centred and will uphold the principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

Jackson Carlaw: I had also noted the contradiction between those two responses. Given the shambles that ensued when the Scottish Government last embarked on a bespoke delivery system—for farm payments, which shambles persists to this day—what confidence can the people of Scotland have, and what assurances can the minister give, that the Scottish Government's incompetence will not be history repeating itself?

Jeane Freeman: I do not want to start trading shambles with Mr Carlaw, but we touched on the shambles around universal credit at the start of this round of portfolio questions.

I have already given the Social Security Committee the absolute assurance that we will learn from and build on all the lessons from various information technology and other programmes conducted by this Government and the United Kingdom Government as we build our social security system and service for Scotland. That is precisely why we are taking the planned approach that we have talked about so often in the chamber—learning from the consultation exercise and, importantly, using direct personal experience through our experience panels, which I am sure that Mr Carlaw and other colleagues are promoting for us, and recruiting the 2,000 volunteers whose personal experience we will draw on and gain much from.

Housing Benefit (18 to 21-year-olds)

9. Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the cabinet secretary.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it has received assurances from the United Kingdom Government that it will not impose the changes to housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds in Scotland while discussions regarding a possible exemption are on-going. (S5O-00805)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): I regret to say that we have not had that assurance. The Department for Work and Pensions rejected our request to draft its regulations in such a way as to allow us to use existing Scotland Act 2016 powers so that we could ensure that young people would not lose access to much-needed housing support.

Despite on-going engagement and a number of requests to that effect, we have not received any reassurances from the United Kingdom Government, even though the DWP's regulations are expected to come into force on 1 April. That is disappointing and dismissive of the difficulties that many young people face in obtaining and sustaining a tenancy in Scotland.

Mairi Evans: I agree that the response is disappointing. Does the minister agree that it is appalling that the Tory Government is removing housing support from vulnerable young people and that the impact of the policy will lead to a rise in the level of homelessness among people in that age group?

Jeane Freeman: I agree with that. The policy will clearly lead to a rise in the level of homelessness among the 18 to 21-year-olds whom we are talking about. The Government's commitment is to retain housing benefit for that age group. The ludicrous consequence of the United Kingdom Government's policy is that, although our strong homelessness legislation in Scotland means that a young person who is assessed as homeless will be entitled to a minimum of temporary accommodation and, therefore, will become eligible for the housing element of universal credit, they will not be able to move into settled accommodation without losing that entitlement. As the chief executive officer of Centrepoint said, the UK Government should scrap the policy rather than try to make a bad policy work.

Poverty (Minority Ethnic Groups)

10. **Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in light of the findings in the report, "Shifting the Curve", that people in minority ethnic groups are often the most disadvantaged and can face additional barriers when trying to get out of poverty. (S5O-00806)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela

Constance): We want to remove the barriers that minority ethnic groups face as we aim to create a fairer, more equal Scotland. Our race equality framework, which was published last year, set out our approach to tackling a range of poverty-related issues through to 2030. Actions include improving information and services on benefit uptake and money advice among minority ethnic groups, and publishing an equalities evidence strategy in spring 2017.

Our fairer Scotland action plan provides a set of poverty and inequality actions that will benefit all of Scotland, including minority ethnic groups, such as bringing forward the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, tackling the poverty premium and delivering at least 50,000 affordable homes over the current parliamentary term.

Scottish ministers also benefit from advice on our approach from both the race equality framework adviser and the independent adviser on poverty and inequality.

Fulton MacGregor: Given the Scottish Government's on-going anti-poverty work, and the aspirations of the race equality framework to tackle poverty for minority ethnic communities, will the cabinet secretary consider asking the independent adviser on poverty and inequality and the race equality framework adviser to meet and discuss the intersections of race and poverty and what could be done to address the disadvantage and barriers that are faced by minority ethnic communities?

Angela Constance: I am pleased to say that the advisers have already met to discuss their respective roles and are due to meet again next month. I will ensure that both advisers are aware of the concerns that Fulton MacGregor has raised today. In the meantime, we are working to ensure that the advice that we receive from our advisers is joined up and encourages co-ordinated cross-Government action. That is why our fairer Scotland action plan is also committed to establishing a national poverty and inequality commission later this year. I will release details of that commission shortly.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary recognise my concern about the European Court of Justice ruling that says that employers can ban their workers from wearing a headscarf at work? The ruling has a particular impact on Muslim women accessing the labour market, but it also has implications for Catholics who might wear a cross at work, Jewish men who wear a skullcap or Sikhs who wear a turban. Can the cabinet secretary say what the Scottish Government will do to address this issue and what action, if any, needs to be taken here to address the impact on employers and on Scottish courts?

Angela Constance: We are very much aware of the judgment from the European Court of Justice, which has ruled that, in some instances, employers have a right to have an internal rule to not allow the wearing of philosophical, political or religious symbols, including, for example, the Islamic headscarf for women. My position and the position of the Scottish Government is that we will never tell women what to wear. It is a matter of individual choice and conscience whether a woman wants to wear a headscarf that is of significance to her personal beliefs. I can confirm, as I did yesterday at a race equality framework event to mark the anniversary of the publication of the action that we will take in and around race equality, that we have no plans to introduce any legislation on this matter, and we are not required to do so.

Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill

11. **Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to concerns that the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill does not contain sufficient measures to lift children out of poverty. (S5O-00807)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): We consulted extensively on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill and have received broad support for our proposals. John Dickie of the Child Poverty Action Group welcomed the bill, saying:

“The ambitious new targets and the legislative framework that underpins them will help ensure that child poverty remains high on the political agenda and that government is consistently held to account.”

I could not agree more. The bill will make Scotland the only part of the United Kingdom with statutory targets on child poverty and demonstrates that we, in stark contrast to the UK Government, will continue to prioritise tackling child poverty.

Adam Tomkins: The bill contains a number of provisions that will measure child poverty, but the point is not just to measure it but to tackle it. Does the Scottish Government accept that there is a link between child poverty and educational underattainment? If so, and given the First Minister’s claim that closing the attainment gap is her top priority, why does the recently introduced Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill contain no provision that requires the Scottish ministers to take steps to address, or indeed to close, the attainment gap?

Angela Constance: It is somewhat ironic that the reason why we are having to introduce a child poverty bill in the first place is that the UK Government scrapped statutory income targets. Statutory income targets recognise that the main driver of child poverty is lack of income. As a Government, we will not be found guilty or wanting

on that issue, unlike the UK Government, which seems determined to sweep child poverty under the carpet.

I also say to Mr Tomkins—although I am sure he knows it—that the bill will require ministers to meet four ambitious statutory targets to reduce child poverty by 2030. The targets set the framework for action. The action itself comes from policies, which is why the bill also requires ministers to have a child poverty delivery plan with very specific measures and policies to lift children out of poverty. The first plan will be published next year and updated in 2021 and 2026.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions. Apologies to members who I was not able to call. We are quite tight for time, given the number of speakers who wish to contribute to this afternoon’s debate.

Independence Referendum

Resumed debate.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is the continuation of the debate on motion S5M-04710, in the name of the First Minister, on Scotland's choice.

14:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): In opening the second day of this important debate on Scotland's choice and Scotland's future, I want to reflect on a number of points.

It is right that this Parliament takes time to debate this most important, fundamental issue of the sovereignty of our people. Yesterday, we heard a large number of members express their sincerely and deeply held views. As in all debates about deeply held views, there was emotion and passion from all sides.

Democratic debate has to reflect the diversity of views, but as speeches yesterday from Bruce Crawford and Ruth Maguire, in particular, warned, this Parliament has a responsibility collectively to lead the debate, in conduct and in tone, with respect and responsible leadership.

That is more important than ever in this most challenging of circumstances for Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe. The UK's withdrawal from the European Union presents Scotland with one of the most critical challenges that it has faced in the modern era, as we face being taken out of the EU against our will. If Scotland can be ignored on an issue as important as this, it is clear that our voice and our interests can be ignored at any time, on any issue.

We produced a substantial plan for both Scotland and the UK to remain in the single market, and we actively engaged with the UK Government when it said that it wanted to reach an agreed UK approach to article 50 negotiations.

So where are we now? The UK Government voted against guaranteeing the residency rights of EU nationals. There has been no serious engagement by the UK Government as an equal partner over our proposals for Scotland's place in Europe. Indeed, without notice and only two days before the Joint Ministerial Committee was to have its first formal consideration of our compromise proposals, the Prime Minister announced that the UK will be outside the single market and, likely, the customs union.

Now the United Kingdom Government speaks recklessly of departing the EU with no deal at all. This is more than a hard Brexit; it is a Brexit that

increasing evidence warns could cause lasting damage to Scotland's economy and jobs, and to vital investment and trade.

The Fraser of Allander institute cautions that under a World Trade Organization rules scenario, gross domestic product in Scotland would be more than £8 billion lower than would otherwise be the case, employment would be 80,000 lower, real wages £2,000 lower, and exports more than 11 per cent lower.

The people of Scotland were told in 2014 that the only way to remain in the EU was to vote against independence. They were later told to vote remain to achieve the same outcome. Scotland has now done both those things, yet we are still being taken out of the EU.

On top of that, the manner and approach of the United Kingdom Government—with only one Conservative MP in Scotland—to withdrawing from the EU has created uncertainty and anxiety. That should matter as much to those who voted leave as it does to those who voted remain.

The terms of the departure that are emerging from Westminster go against our nation's fundamental values of fairness, welcome and openness to the world, including our European friends and neighbours, as well as going against the economic self-interest that freedom of movement affords Scottish business and Scottish jobs that are reliant on EU nationals.

This Government was mandated by the Scottish Parliament immediately after the EU referendum to do all that we can to protect Scotland's interests. That we have done and will continue to do.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Can the cabinet secretary tell us what the Scottish Government's position is on Europe today? Is it full or partial membership today, or are we waiting to hear Alex Neil's advice before coming to a decision?

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish National Party's position and the position of the Scottish Government is as it has been for some time: EU membership. That is what we are pursuing.

We were elected less than a year ago on a manifesto that explicitly set out:

"the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will."

The Government understands that people have been asked to make a number of momentous decisions in a short period of time, but these circumstances are not of our choosing. Change will happen because of Brexit. We need to decide how we respond and how the people of Scotland

can exercise their sovereign power to determine their future in these changing circumstances.

Should the Parliament decide to hold a Scottish referendum, our proposed timeframe is logical and sensible: at some point between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of 2019. We are suggesting holding a Scottish referendum not now but when the terms of the Brexit deal are ready.

To fit in with the Prime Minister's timeframe, the article 50 negotiations will be concluded by October 2018. The European Commission has made that clear. So, the terms of the deal will be known before any independence referendum.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I am closing my remarks.

We will set out the opportunities and the challenges of independence well in advance of a referendum.

As a consequence of the Brexit vote, much is now at stake for Scotland that impacts on not only our relationship with the EU but who we are as a nation. It is impossible to deny that this is a fundamental, never mind "significant and material", change in circumstances since 2014. The next two years are hugely important for Scotland. They will determine the kind of country that we are to become. In those changed circumstances and in that different context, surely it must be for the people of Scotland to decide their future. It is their choice. Let the people decide their future.

I support the motion.

14:48

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): In the run-up to the first independence referendum, there was a widespread acceptance that the Scottish National Party Government had the right to hold a referendum. It was right that the Scottish people were able to decide this important constitutional issue.

If the independence referendum had gone the other way, I would have accepted the result—sadly, but I would have accepted it. I would have done everything in my power to make an independent Scotland a success. Lamentably, that democratic spirit finds no home in the SNP. When the SNP talks about a mandate, here is the mandate that it should respect: the democratic will of the 2 million Scots who rejected independence and supported the union.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Is the member arguing that there should never be another vote? Even with elections, we have another vote after four or five years or whatever it

is. Is he arguing that we should never have another vote?

Maurice Golden: It was the SNP that first declared that the referendum was a once in a generation event. In no one's book is less than three years a generation. Now is not the time.

Since the independence referendum, I and hundreds of thousands of other Scots have voted remain in the EU referendum, as part of the United Kingdom. We did not vote to remain only to see the SNP twist our votes for its own political gain. Today, poll after poll shows that the Scottish people do not want another independence referendum in the next two years. The SNP has the ability, even at this late hour, to uphold the democratic decision of the Scottish people and allow Scotland to move on and deal with the issues that Scots really care about.

The SNP's obsession with independence has already cost Scotland a decade of failure. Education has gone backwards, with the latest programme for international student assessment results being our worst ever; environmental targets are consistently missed, with Scotland having the worst recycling rate in Britain; our health service is struggling, with a general practitioner crisis, missed targets and widespread delays; and the SNP-centralised police force is in a mess, hurt further by the SNP's soft touch on crime. There is so much more that I simply do not have time to list. Given all that, the last thing that the SNP should be doing is trying to inflict another divisive referendum on Scotland.

Looking forward, the SNP has repeatedly failed to explain what currency an independent Scotland would use, what spending cuts or tax rises it would impose and what our status with the EU would be. As for Brexit, we heard yesterday—and a little earlier—from the SNP about the prospect of the EU and UK reverting to WTO trading rules. However, in that scenario, an independent Scotland as an EU member would face trading tariffs with the rest of the UK—a market that to Scotland is worth four times the EU market. The rationale that we need to be independent to join the EU and to protect Scotland's economy from trade tariffs between Europe and the UK, only then, as a member of the EU single market, to have those trade tariffs imposed back upon us in our trade with the rest of the UK, is simply ludicrous. The economics of the argument do not add up.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Maurice Golden: I will finish this point, which might well answer the member's question.

Furthermore, the significance of the EU market to Scotland is diminishing. Since 2002, Scottish

exports to the EU market have grown by only 8 per cent, while trade within the UK single market has increased by 74 per cent and trade with the rest of the world has increased by 85 per cent. Despite all that, the SNP wants to put our trading relationship with the EU ahead of the internal UK market. That refusal to recognise any benefit that is derived from being part of the UK is a result of an increasingly nasty nationalism.

The situation took a turn for the worse over the weekend, with further seeds of division sown. A senior SNP minister stated that the debate should be propositioned around the theme of Scotland against the Tories. That is dangerous, because it equates the SNP with Scotland. It seeks to define nationhood and nationality in the SNP's image. It says to the half a million Scots who voted Conservative at the last election that they are not Scottish and they do not have a place in the SNP's Scotland. Let me tell the SNP this: I am Scottish and you do not speak for me. Such abject and abrasive language from the SNP does not serve Scotland's interests. I urge the SNP to moderate its tone and do its best to avoid the vile slurs, hatred and bully-boy tactics of the previous independence campaign.

The SNP must put Scotland first and respect the democratic decision that Scotland took in 2014. Now is not the time for a second independence referendum.

14:54

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): On a personal note, I thank you, Presiding Officer, Paul Grice, the staff and all my friends across the chamber for the messages of best wishes and support during my recent illness. You will be glad to know, Presiding Officer, that I was able to tweet from the ambulance that there would be no Airdrie and Shotts by-election. [*Applause.*]

I have campaigned all my adult life for Scottish independence. I want to see a second referendum at the right time and in the right circumstances, so that it succeeds. As with the first referendum, the arrangements, including the timing, must be decided by the Scottish Parliament—not in Downing Street, Whitehall or Westminster.

In taking the decisions, this Parliament must adopt three basic principles. The first principle, on which there is, I think, universal agreement across the chamber, is that the referendum should be held only once we know the final outcome of the Brexit negotiations between the UK and EU. The Brexit deal will inform the Scottish Government's prospectus for the trading relationships between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK and the EU. That is all the more important because trading relationships are likely to be as

important in deciding the outcome of indyref 2 as the currency was in deciding the result of indyref 1.

We should also not forget that there are, in effect, two Brexit deals to be done. One will cover the UK's exit arrangements from the EU; the other will be on the successor trading relationships between the UK and EU. Although there is a statutory deadline for the former, there is not one for the latter. Therefore, it is possible that all will not be done and dusted by March 2019. Negotiations on a trade deal might—I hope that they do not—extend beyond that date. The Scottish Government has recognised that and built flexibility into its position.

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

Alex Neil: I will give way in a minute.

I support the Government's motion on the basis that we need to know the outcomes of both the exiting deal and the trading deal before we hold a second independence referendum.

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that we all welcome Alex Neil back to the chamber for the debate.

Alex Neil is quite right about the deal on the UK exiting the EU. All other EU member states will have a chance to ratify that deal but, at present, people in Scotland will not. Is he saying that he has confidence that the UK Government will represent Scotland's interests subsequent to that deal when negotiating a trading arrangement? Given the UK Government's track record so far, does he have confidence that it will respect Scotland?

Alex Neil: I am saying that the realpolitik is that we might end up with one deal with two parts, because there is an exiting aspect and a future trading relationships aspect. If we live in the real world, we need to take cognisance of that. The first part will inform the independence prospectus, because the trading relationship and not just the exiting deal will inform our future and the options for an independent Scotland. It is in all our interests that an acceptable Brexit deal be reached between the UK and EU. The best possible deal would be to have tariff-free and friction-free trading between the UK and the EU after Brexit.

The second—self-evident—principle is that we need to take the people with us in the process. Getting broad acceptance of the need for and timing of the referendum by the time that it is due to be triggered will assist our chances of winning it.

The final principle that this Parliament should consider is separation of the issue of independence from the issue of whether an

independent Scotland should apply for EU membership. A yes vote in an independence referendum cannot be interpreted as a dual mandate for independence and for an independent Scotland to join the EU. I believe that the two issues must be decoupled, and that the explicit approval of the Scottish people must be sought before Scotland applies to rejoin the EU as an independent state.

The result of an EU referendum cannot be taken for granted. To ask whether an independent Scotland should join the EU when the rest of the UK is not in it is a very different question from the question that was asked last year, which was whether we wanted the UK to remain in the EU, because the UK would be outside the customs union and we would be in it, which would have major implications. Different questions very often elicit different answers. Whether we do it as part of the independence referendum or once we are independent, we must ask the Scottish people two questions, because it is their choice—it is their decision. The first question is, “Do you want Scotland to be independent? Yes or no?” The second question, which must be asked at some stage, is, “Do you want an independent Scotland to join the European Union? Yes or no?” I believe that that is a fair position for everybody, whether remainder or leaver, because it would give the people the decision on EU membership as well as the decision on independence.

For the record—I cannot help but say this, especially after Mr Harvie’s intervention—when it comes to a referendum on EU membership, I find myself in a position in which I find it no more appetising for Scotland to be ruled by Mr Juncker than for it to be ruled by Mrs May. In my view, austerity from London and austerity from Brussels are equally damaging to not just Scotland but the rest of the UK and, indeed, the rest of Europe.

There are big decisions to be made, but I believe that if we follow the three fundamentally democratic principles that I have outlined, we will live up to the vision and aspirations of this Parliament. Regardless of which side of the argument we are on, we will all earn the respect of the Scottish people if we conduct ourselves in a fair, transparent and democratic manner.

15:02

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): As we set off on day 2 of the debate, I want to start at its core, which is the fundamental difference between Labour and the Government.

Labour’s politics will always seek to unite people rather than to separate them, to heal division rather than to sow it, and to pool sovereignty individually and collectively for the greater good.

The SNP will always look to separate this country and to divide this nation. It will campaign each and every day for independence at any cost, whatever the circumstances. I heard what the cabinet secretary said about Brexit. Of course, she is right: Brexit is causing division, uncertainty, anxiety and economic damage, and that is the Tories’ fault. However, the absurd idea that the solution is more division, further uncertainty and even greater economic damage is all the SNP’s.

The First Minister founds her demands on a manifesto commitment. That argument might carry some force if SNP manifesto commitments had not had the quality of letters in the sand, in that they have been fleetingly glimpsed then washed away by the tide of expediency. Let us remember the commitments to abolish student debt, to cut class sizes, to maintain teacher numbers, to build the Glasgow airport rail link and—oh, yes—to abolish the council tax. All those cast-iron commitments were as disposable as a Scottish Green Party election promise.

No more convincing is the First Minister’s solemn plea that the Parliament be respected. She herself has refused to do that, cynically and systematically. She had no answer yesterday when she was confronted with her own contempt for Parliament on fracking, health services and education. When it came to her argument for another referendum, she announced it not here, but in her residence. She elaborated on it at her party conference, and she defended it in any television studio that she could find before she saw fit to bring it here to Parliament.

Nor has the First Minister had the grace to acknowledge that she has failed Parliament. Ms Hyslop was right: last year, we mandated the First Minister with negotiating a way for Scotland to maintain as many of the advantages of the EU as possible within the United Kingdom. I accept that the Prime Minister has been utterly inept in her response, but is the truth not that whatever careful, quiet negotiation the ever-consensual Mike Russell has attempted has been drowned out by the First Minister’s daily megaphone diplomacy of indyref 2 threats? Nicola Sturgeon’s referendum demand is an admission that she has been found wanting in the task that Parliament gave her last year—or worse, it is a confession that the will of Parliament to find that compromise was never more than a useful fig leaf in her indyref quest.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): Now that Mr Gray has acknowledged that Theresa May is “inept”, can he tell us what the Labour Party’s response to that ineptitude has been?

Iain Gray: The problem that we face, and the conundrum that must be answered, is not the Labour Party’s but the Scottish people’s, because it is the Scottish people who are caught between

two intransigent, belligerent and inept Governments. Those Governments are not listening to each other, and they are certainly not listening to the people.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Mr Wightman asked a question about what the Labour Party's answer has been to the conundrum that Mr Gray mentioned. Can we hear that, please?

Iain Gray: Our position, clearly, is that it is possible to create a much more federal United Kingdom that far better meets the needs of the people across this nation. I said that the two Governments are not listening to each other; Mr Swinney makes it clear that they are not listening to anybody else, either.

The First Minister told the Scottish people that her defining mission, her top priority and her sacred responsibility is education, but her defining mission is, was and always shall be independence. In 2007, independence was the SNP's mission. We had a national conversation on independence, a draft bill on independence, a white paper on independence and another white paper on an independence referendum.

In 2011, independence was its mission. We had negotiations on an independence referendum, an agreement on an independence referendum, a section 30 order on an independence referendum, the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Act 2013, an independence white paper and the referendum itself.

This session of Parliament is not a year old and we have had a national survey on independence, a draft independence referendum bill, an independence growth commission and now a section 30 demand. This is not a two-day debate—the debate has raged in and ravaged this country for the 3,500 days of 10 long years. In that time, our schools have haemorrhaged teachers, child poverty has soared, literacy and numeracy have plummeted, our national health service has reached breaking point and our economy has stalled. Yet, after 10 years, there are still no answers on the big questions about currency, the EU, trade terms, borders and the cuts that would be required by independence.

The First Minister says that the people's voice must be heard. She has conversed with them, consulted them and asked them the once-in-a-lifetime question. They gave their answer, and it was no. Now the people are saying, "Enough is enough. It's time to stop the campaign, not restart it. It's time to heal the wounds, not reopen them." Listen to them, First Minister. For the love of Scotland, listen to them.

15:09

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Much has been made in the debate across both days about who holds a mandate on Scotland's constitutional question, given that our nation is being dragged out of the European Union against our will. Who holds a constitutional mandate as Scotland faces a hard Brexit that we did not choose, with all the ensuing risks and damage that that will certainly bring?

Let us be clear: the SNP's 2016 election manifesto stated:

"We believe that the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will."

The SNP won that election with 46.5 per cent of the popular vote and there has, of course, been a significant and material change in circumstances with Scotland being dragged out of the EU against our will. Sixty-two per cent of those who voted in the EU referendum clearly expressed a wish to retain our EU membership. That is the context of this debate.

We should contrast that 46.5 per cent of the popular vote and the explicit reference to a future independence referendum with the votes that were polled by the second and third parties in the Scottish Parliament. They polled little more than 22 per cent of the vote each; the combined figure is still less than the Scottish Government's share of the popular vote. However, over both days of this debate, we have heard Opposition MSP after Opposition MSP lecturing and condemning the Scottish Government for seeking to implement an undeniable and explicit democratic mandate. That is not a mandate for independence; rather, it is a mandate to ensure that the people of Scotland have a choice.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): Can Bob Doris tell us whether any poll since last year has shown that a majority of Scottish people are in favour of a second independence referendum?

Bob Doris: The short answer is yes, but the even clearer answer is the ballot box.

Our Opposition parties have demonstrated an affront to democracy. Let us compare the SNP's clear manifesto commitment and the Scottish Government's self-evident mandate, with 46.5 per cent of the Scottish vote, with the records of previous UK Governments. I do not recall a 2001 manifesto commitment for Tony Blair and the Labour Party to take Britain into an illegal war in Iraq; they got 43 per cent of the Scottish vote. I do not recall a Tory mandate to govern Scotland in 1987 with 24 per cent of the vote, but the Tories savaged our communities with the poll tax. What

about more recently, in 2010? With the paltry 16.7 per cent of the vote that the Tories got in Scotland, they brought the despised bedroom tax and horrific austerity to our country. Where was the mandate there? The Opposition parties should answer that question, but they do not have an answer to it, so let us take no lessons on mandates from Opposition parties.

Our Scottish Government is simply asking to afford the Scottish people the right to make an informed choice between a hard-Brexit Britain and a modern, independent European nation.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: No. I am sorry, but I do not have enough time.

That is all the choice that the Scottish Government is asking for. I can think of nothing more divisive in Scotland than Labour and the Conservatives telling the people of Scotland, irrespective of whether they support independence or the union, that Labour and the Tories know best and, in fact, that they are so convinced of their views on independence that they will not even allow the people of Scotland to have their say. The most divisive thing that the political classes can do in any democracy is to deny the people a vote on their own self-determination, and that is precisely what the UK Tory Government is seeking to do to Scotland.

One of the most significant aspects of the debate about the mandate to hold an independence referendum is the growing realisation that, no matter what Scotland's Parliament decides, any Scottish Government of any party colour would need to go cap in hand to a right-wing UK Tory Government to ask for permission in the first place. That might be the legal position, but it is a democratic outrage.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: No, I am sorry.

I want to comment briefly on the re-emerging project fear alliance between the Conservatives and the Labour Party, with reference to my local area in particular. Let me tell members what that alliance meant in my Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency—the Labour Party should really listen to this. It meant that three different, worried individuals who turned up at the yes hub in the Maryhill Road area of Glasgow in my constituency complained that the Labour Party was targeting the doors of pensioners in the area and telling them that their pensions would stop not after independence but the day after a yes vote. Such lies, fears and smears should have no place in any future Scottish referendum campaign. I was

delighted that my constituency voted 57 per cent for Scottish independence and I place on record my thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who were such an inspiration and so positive for the Yes Scotland campaign.

I return to the theme of division and, in doing so, I will repeat some of what I said in a debate in the Scottish Parliament on 24 September 2014. Speaking about the Friday morning after the referendum result had become clear, I said:

"I received a text from my sister that I want to share."

To provide some context, my niece Emily, who I will refer to, was nine then and my sister's oldest daughter, Beth, was 14. I told members that my sister's text said:

"Emily just woke up. Her first two words were, 'mummy, Independence?' 'No, darling.' 'Is it not?' was her reply." [Laughter.]

I did not realise that that was a matter for laughter, but I think that the people of Scotland will judge members on that. The text continued:

"Just found out my oldest daughter joined the SNP. Paid £2 for the privilege. Well done Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire you all worked extremely hard. I have never seen the Vale like this before!"—

That is my home town—

'Even when mum voted'—

she is very frail—

'in her slippers I was very proud of her Robert! Try and sleep both of you. We are all very proud in this household'."

I was proud of what my mum, who has since passed away, did that day. I told members:

"It made me cry. It made me cry tears of pride ... not tears of despair."—[Official Report, 24 September 2014; c 40.]

My nieces, my sister and my frail mum, who as I said has now sadly passed away, were not driven by conflict and division; they simply wanted a better future for their family, their community and their country, so how dare Iain Gray come to the chamber and talk about us sowing the seeds of division and how dare Maurice Golden talk about nasty nationalism!

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): You must come to a close, please.

Bob Doris: The vast majority of people on both sides of the constitutional debate do not want to divide us but just want the best for their country. Some will never shift their views, because they are so deeply held.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: I will finish by saying that I want an independent Scotland. I will not tell people that they should not have a vote: let the people decide.

Do not block the people, as the Labour Party and the Conservatives want to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I note that the previous two speakers have gone well over their time. I ask members to stick to six minutes. I also request those in the public gallery to please refrain from clapping or otherwise in any of the speeches.

15:17

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I rise to offer my support for the Liberal Democrat amendment and to keep a promise that I made to the residents of Edinburgh Western who sent me to the Parliament. This debate is about holding another referendum, but it serves as a proxy, as similar debates have done previously, for the wider discussion about our continuing place in the United Kingdom. These islands run through me, from the greater London new town of my birth, to the hilltops of Wales, where we scattered my grandfather's ashes.

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: No, I will not. No such courtesy was afforded to me in the debate yesterday, so I will not do it today. I have no time to take an intervention.

These islands run through me, from my children being born in Edinburgh to a Scottish mother, to the distant memories of my family's origins in Enniskillen. I could not act to see the dissolution of the unity of these islands by a referendum, any more than my colleagues could act during the five years of the coalition Government to see a referendum on EU withdrawal—I see no inconsistency in that position.

There has been much talk of mandates in the debate, and I have my mandate. I stood for election on a commitment to oppose a second referendum in exactly these circumstances, so I have my instructions.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I have said that I will not take an intervention.

We live in a time of political chaos when the wheel has turned in ways that we never thought possible, and we still have revelations to come. At times like this, I can only hold on to what I know for certain and what I feel in my heart. I am an internationalist to my bones and I believe that a political union of nations does nothing to dilute the integrity, independence or strength of the union's member states, any more than an orchestra diminishes the violin. Such political unions foster a

platform from which solidarity, shared endeavour and prosperity can flourish.

We have heard many times in the debate about the rancour and division of the past, but I would put that behind us. We have so much in the United Kingdom union to be grateful for. I am a passionate European, and I am bitterly devastated by Brexit, but I recognise that I might have to campaign for the rest of my life to see closer integration between the UK and Europe, and I shall do so; it is the policy of my party. However, I will not trade one political union that I hold dear for the whispered promise of another, insubstantial as that may be.

In this debate, we have seen so much passion and absolute focus—Bruce Crawford spoke about our need to keep it focused on what is right. I think back to my time as a candidate in elections, when I made a promise to my constituents. It is important that we recognise the United Kingdom's strengths. In the past, the EU has given us so much—and we have been ripped out of it, for sure. Now we sit at a time of great change in our society. We look back to the resolution—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, just one second; I get very emotional about this.

The dysfunctional nature of our United Kingdom has, at times, been a source of great pain to our country. It has caused us a history in which the empire created at times a brutal and difficult period for us to go forward in.

Maurice Golden: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will.

Maurice Golden: What does the member see as being the future relationship of the Liberal Democrats with Europe, and how does he see Scotland prospering as part of a friendship and a gathering together?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I appreciate the member's intervention. Our history together as a united family of nations is incredibly important to the way in which the world reflects that this—*[Interruption.]*

Maree Todd: Would the member perhaps like to take an intervention now?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: No—it is fine. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your last minute, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I know I am.

These islands run through me. Their history inspires me, but it also haunts me.

I also recognise that there are times in a parliamentarian's career when he makes

speeches that he wishes that he had not tried to learn off pat but had actually brought with him to the chamber. [*Laughter.*]

I reflect on the union of nations. My ancestor Arthur Cole-Hamilton—the first of my name—who was MP for Tyrone at the time of Wilberforce, saw great things happen in the awakening of an entire nation to the advent of the abolition of slavery. It is with that spirit that I believe that we have so much to fight for in the United Kingdom. I absolutely feel that I should discharge my mandate and vote against this referendum.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before you begin, Ms McAlpine, I have something that I would like to say. Some members might already be aware, but I want to make sure that all members are informed. There are reports of an incident at Westminster. Details are still emerging, and the parliamentary authorities are currently liaising with Police Scotland and keeping security at Holyrood under review. We will update members once we have a clearer picture.

15:24

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the thoughts of everyone here are with anyone affected by that incident at Westminster.

It is bittersweet that, in the week in which the anniversary of the treaty of Rome is celebrated, we stand here debating Scotland's future as a European nation. It is right that we should praise the common values—solidarity, co-operation and multilateralism—that we share with our European neighbours. As we speak about trying to preserve what we have, Europe is having a conversation about the future: about how to tackle the big issues, from climate change and the environment to the challenges that are created by Trump in the west and Putin in the east. To paraphrase Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, never has it been so clear that only by working together with our European allies can we be fully independent.

However, no matter how important that is, today's debate is not just about Europe. We are citizens, not subjects, and today is about democracy. In a successful union, one partner does not ride roughshod over the other's wishes. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is not, and nor has it ever been, made up of one nation. It is a set of unions between nations that is based, in theory, on common interest and outlook. That theory is now being tested and—I would argue—found wanting.

The EU referendum result was challenging, but it is the aftermath that has been more revealing. The differences of opinion in the UK should have been accommodated, but when compromise and

collaboration was needed, only one side stepped up to the plate. The Government of Scotland has not only spoken for those who voted to remain, but put forward a constructive plan to represent all of Scotland, including those who voted to leave the EU but—crucially—not the single market. The document “Scotland's Place in Europe” is a serious and credible compromise. It was built on the expertise of a standing council that was made up of independent experts, and which included a range of political views.

We should remember that the aim of producing some form of bespoke solution was supported not only by the SNP but by a majority of members of the Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee. Perhaps more important is that, irrespective of the detail of the proposal, that committee agreed that the UK must consider and respond to the ideas that are contained in “Scotland's Place in Europe”. To be clear, an answer should be delivered not via the media, nor in a speech to the public, but through a direct response to the Scottish Government. So far, that has not been delivered. In fact, the UK Government's most important statement to date has been an announcement that its plan is for the UK to leave the single market. That announcement was made two days before the JMC had the chance to consider “Scotland's Place in Europe”, including its first proposal that the whole of the UK should remain in the single market.

Although it has now been publicly announced that the article 50 letter will be submitted on 29 March, the Scottish Government has received no indication of what is in that letter. The shortcomings of the JMC are obvious to all. The system has quite clearly—through no fault of the Scottish Government or the other devolved Administrations—failed. It has failed even to meet its own terms of reference, which are to seek to agree a UK approach to, and objectives for, the article 50 negotiations.

The UK Government's unwillingness to engage is even more frustrating given that there is clearly a will in Europe to address the issue. The European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee has noted that the EU should prepare to address the questions that are raised in the Scottish Government's compromise proposal. However, the UK represents us in the EU and must deliver for Scotland by putting forward such a request. If the UK refuses to put Scotland's case to the EU in that letter and the subsequent negotiations, we are powerless. Do we just sit back and see what is coming, or do we prepare to make a choice?

The article 50 letter should include a demand to negotiate a differentiated settlement for Scotland

that will allow us to continue to enjoy the benefits of the European single market in addition to—not instead of—free trade across the UK. That could be done, but I am not holding my breath.

We are here today because the people of Scotland should be given a choice. This Parliament has a clear mandate to deliver that to them through a referendum that will allow them to choose what kind of society they want to live in. The bottom line is simple: Scotland's future should be in Scotland's hands, and nobody should seek to prevent that.

15:29

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I reiterate the sentiments that Joan McAlpine expressed: our thoughts—and everyone else's, I am sure—are with those down in Westminster today.

Here we are, less than three years since the once in a generation referendum vote, and once again I will defend our nation with my heart and soul, as I did in the previous vote in 2014. It was during the referendum that my political fire was lit. I know that there are many people like me who thought, "Och, it's okay—someone else will be fighting this battle." However, we needed more, and a battle it was.

I did not expect that, only 917 days since we last voted, I would be standing in this Parliament representing the 2,001,926 people who voted no. I am a democrat and I believe that we should respect the votes of the Scottish and British public. That is why, although I campaigned and voted to remain in the EU, I absolutely respect the votes of the 17,410,742 people who voted to leave.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Annie Wells: No—I will not be taking interventions, thank you.

We have heard from SNP members during the debate that Scotland has been dragged or pulled out of the EU or forced to leave it against our will. The Scottish people who voted no back in 2014 were very much aware that there was going to be a referendum on the EU, as were Nicola Sturgeon and her colleagues. The white paper spoke about the consequences of voting no.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: No. I will not, thank you.

It astounds me that we heard, not once but twice, from the First Minister of Scotland—once in her conference speech in 2015 and then during her Scottish Parliament election campaign—that there should be no second referendum until 2021 unless there was evidence that people wanted it. Even John Swinney said that there would have to

be "strong and consistent evidence" that voters supported independence, and Stewart Hosie said that a second referendum would have to wait until polling showed an overwhelming majority for three years in support of holding another referendum.

We know that that is not the case, with poll after poll showing no shift in momentum in support for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom. This is not "Scotland's Choice", as the debate has been so ironically titled by the Scottish Government; it is Nicola's choice.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Annie Wells: I will not be taking any interventions, thank you. I will do the same as the Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe did yesterday, and I will not take any interventions today.

I have been round the doors and spoken to voters in Glasgow. Only a month ago, I was at a door in the east end of Glasgow, and I remember saying to someone in my team, "I was at this door last year and the guy was SNP." However, as you do, I just rang anyway. When the gentleman opened the door, he said, "I remember you from when you were here during last year's Scottish Parliament elections, and I told you I was SNP." I asked, "What about now?" and he said, "Well, I'll be voting for you guys this time, as only Ruth Davidson and the Scottish Conservatives can sort out this mess." Those are not my words; they are the words of a constituent of mine in the east end of Glasgow.

People are starting to get tired of the SNP. How many times have we heard it uttered in recent months that the SNP-led Scottish Government needs to return to its day job? How many times have people brought up the need to concentrate on the issues that affect everyday lives, such as justice, health and education? Other members can berate us all they like in the chamber, but the public polls are for us on this issue. A survey this week showed that Scotland put Theresa May's approval rating a full 6 percentage points higher than that for Scotland's First Minister and that Ruth Davidson is a full 11 percentage points ahead. How can the Scottish Government speak so confidently about having the mandate of the Scottish people? It does not.

The Scottish Green Party's manifesto stated, regarding a second independence referendum:

"In assessing public appetite for a second referendum we will respect new kinds of citizen-led initiatives—for example, a call for a referendum signed by up to 1 million people on the electoral register."

My colleagues and I have found no evidence of such a list. Patrick Harvie retorts that 62 per cent of Scottish people voted to stay in the EU, but that

does not equate by default to 62 per cent of Scotland's people wanting to leave the UK.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Will the member give way on that point?

Annie Wells: No, I will not.

I am in the 62 per cent for a start, as are a number of Scots who, when push comes to shove, would choose the UK every time. Does Patrick Harvie's argument have any credibility when the Scottish Government cannot even outline a plan for rejoining the EU, never mind actually joining it? I therefore remind Patrick Harvie of his comments on STV on 10 October 2015, when he said that the public should be responsible for calling a second referendum and that it should not be about political parties

"carving up a deal behind closed doors".

Will the Greens keep their promise or is the door firmly shut on them and the SNP?

Does the SNP have plans in the near future to use two days of parliamentary time to debate tackling the crisis in public services? Will two days of parliamentary time be given to tackling falling education standards, which Nicola Sturgeon says is her top priority? Will two days of parliamentary time be dedicated to tackling waiting times in our hospitals? Will two days of parliamentary time be spent trying to find solutions to the problems engulfing Police Scotland?

The time for a second independence referendum is not now.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I recognise the importance of this debate, but many members are increasingly distracted by the news of the violent attack that appears to have occurred at Westminster. In light of those circumstances, have the Presiding Officer and the business managers considered whether it might be appropriate to suspend the debate until the picture becomes clearer and members can concentrate fully on the business in hand?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That has been considered and it has been decided to carry on with business as usual.

15:36

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the debate, as it is about not just what is best for Scotland, but the democratic rights of our people. We have listened to the same arguments time and again from the Opposition benches, so it is important to stress that the main point at the very heart of the debate is the right of the Scottish people to choose their future.

The debate is about not our personal or political views, but the public and the rights of our nation. Today, I am not here to be a staunch advocate for independence—no matter how much I may want to be. Today, I stand before you as an advocate for choice. As parliamentarians, elected to represent the people of our constituencies and give the everyday public a voice, we must be advocates for choice. Despite our differing opinions about how we wish to see Scotland move forward, we must allow the people to decide and we must give them the power to enact the changes that they wish to see.

In 2014, many people voted no because they felt hesitant about the idea of change, and that is an understandable position. However, now we are in a vastly different situation. Change is now inevitable, and it should be up to the people of Scotland to decide what that change will be, once the terms of Brexit are known. The ramifications of the decisions that we make today, tomorrow and in the years to come will have a lasting effect on the lives and opportunities of our children, grandchildren and future generations in Scotland. We therefore must allow our people to make those decisions. They should not be made by the Westminster Parliament.

At the moment, we have a Prime Minister and a party at the helm who have never thought of Scotland as being their equal. Take what happened on Monday as an example: our Government found out that Article 50 will be triggered next Wednesday only after watching the news. If the Westminster Government cannot pick up the phone to inform us of dates and the timeline of action, how can we trust it to look out for Scotland's interests in a post-Brexit world?

The very real concern for me and many Scots is the prospect of there being a right-wing Tory Government until at least 2030, and of us being dragged out of the EU and the single market against our will. Why would we seek to deny our public the ability to choose a different option?

We cannot bury our heads in the sand and hope for the best. I believe that Scotland must be offered a choice between a hard Brexit and a more progressive future for our nation, and I trust the people of Scotland to make that choice. I believe that the detailed arrangements for a referendum, including the timing, franchise and question, should be for the Scottish Parliament alone to decide.

The Prime Minister's blatant disregard of Scotland during EU negotiations, and her flippant

"Now is not the time"

dismissal of a second referendum demonstrate that our voice and interests can be ignored at any time. The Prime Minister's response of

“Now is not the time”

to the First Minister’s announcement shows that not only does she not listen to Scotland, but that she is happy to admonish us as though we are unruly children.

We propose a choice between a hard Brexit and choosing our own path, when the terms of Brexit are known and there is still an opportunity to change course. The First Minister has also been clear that, if the Prime Minister’s concern is timing, within reason she is happy to have a discussion and be flexible on that. Time and again, the Scottish Government has been willing to discuss alternative options. It even offered a big compromise that would mean that Scotland would reluctantly leave the EU if we could stay in the single market. Unfortunately, the UK Government has refused even to listen to that compromise.

In 2014, the people of Scotland were promised that a no vote would secure their EU membership and in 2016, 62 per cent of Scots voted remain. That is why we will not allow a hard Brexit to be forced upon Scotland against our will. The only way to avoid that is to give our people a choice.

In the cold light of day, the harsh truth is that the cost and effect of a hard Brexit will be immense. The Fraser of Allander Institute found that Scotland would lose 80,000 jobs as a result of Brexit. Let us think about that number for a minute. Eighty thousand jobs across the country could be lost as a result of Westminster’s desire for a hard Brexit. That is more than 1,000 jobs in my constituency alone. I do not know about you, Presiding Officer, but the thought of 1,000 hard-working Paisley buddies losing their job as a result of Tory inflexibility is not the future that I want for Scotland.

Now is the time to offer our nation the chance to escape a hard Brexit and unending Tory austerity. Now is the time to give the people of Scotland an alternative.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The member talks about job losses and austerity. What would the cost be of closing the £15 billion deficit? What would the cost be of trading under WTO rules with a partner whose trade is worth four times more to us than our trade with the rest of Europe?

George Adam: The member is obviously not listening to the point of my speech, which is that we are asking the people of Scotland to make that choice. Eighty thousand jobs will be taken away from Scotland. This is about us making the choice and moving forward. The member needs to bear that in mind. It is not about our personalities or our politics; it is about Scotland’s future and Scotland’s choices.

Now is the time to give the people of Scotland an alternative. Above all—above political and personal views—now is the time to be advocates for democracy and choice and allow the people of Scotland to decide for themselves what sort of country they want to be in and what kind of future they want.

15:41

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): As many members have said over the past couple of days, it has been only two and a half years since the last independence referendum. At that time, we were promised that it was a once in a generation event. Clearly, for the First Minister, a generation is barely five minutes, so that is a promise broken.

Having shadowed Nicola Sturgeon for a period of time when she was health minister, I can tell the chamber what she means when she talks about compromise. Compromise is not meeting in the middle and compromise is not listening to each other’s point of view. Compromise is not even about trying to find common ground—and, believe me, I tried. In the First Minister’s world, compromise means agreeing with her completely. When the First Minister talks about compromise, what she really means is, “My way or no way at all”.

Fiona Hyslop: Does the member appreciate that the proposals in “Scotland’s Place in Europe” were for single market membership, which many people on the leave side thought was correct and for which this Parliament, including Labour Party members, voted after a consensual debate?

Jackie Baillie: I understand exactly how the First Minister operates. Day after day, we have had demand after demand and position change after position change, and that is no way to engage in a negotiation.

A lot has been said about a cast-iron mandate, but do not listen to what I have to say on that. In the words of Jim Sillars:

“Today’s SNP Government did not win a majority, nor has it a mandate because it did not ask for one ... No amount of posturing changes that political weakness of the 2016 election result.”

He is right. Although the SNP’s manifesto commitment was in part tied to the EU, the reality is that Scotland will be outside the EU, whether or not it votes for independence. The SNP’s ambition is to be in the European Free Trade Association, which is a long way short of EU membership. If the SNP Government was being honest, as Alex Neil has been, it would tell you that it does not want full membership of the EU. Just look at the changes to the Government’s position in the last week alone.

I remember the EU referendum well. In my local area, the SNP was notable by its absence—nowhere to be seen on the streets or campaigning. As one SNP member told me, they did not want Brussels rule, just as they did not want London rule, so they did not care less.

Members will know that I hang on Nicola Sturgeon's every word, and she was very clear that there would be a triple lock against independence: it needed to be in the manifesto, then people had to vote for the manifesto before getting a vote on independence. The majority of people in Scotland did not do so; they did not back the SNP. With a majority of people in Scotland saying that they do not want another referendum any time soon, the First Minister is in danger of doing a David Cameron by leading the country into another referendum that it does not want, simply to satisfy the party activists.

I will vote against a second referendum tonight. Much has been made of respecting the will of Parliament, but only when it suits the SNP. They just ignore votes on the Vale of Leven maternity unit, the Inverclyde maternity unit, the children's ward at the Royal Alexandra hospital, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Higher and Further Education Funding Council, their abysmal record in education, the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, and the list goes on. Democracy only happens when it is convenient for the SNP.

I want to focus on the economy because it is the biggest single challenge facing the country. Of course there will be economic consequences from Brexit, whether it be hard or soft, but they pale in comparison with the economic consequences of independence. Indeed, there will be economic consequences of simply having a referendum.

The Scottish economy is fragile. Growth is down and has been revised downward still. Employment is down and the number of people who are economically inactive is growing. Across virtually every economic measure, we underperform the rest of the UK. We clearly must do better in domestic policy in any event. Before the independence referendum the price of oil was \$113; now it is around \$50 a barrel. Central to the SNP's independence white paper, it was then considered by the SNP to be only a bonus, but we know how central it is to the Scottish economy, never mind the economy of the north-east.

Now the SNP talks about how important the EU is as an export market for Scotland, and it is. However, it neglects to tell us that Scotland exports four times that amount to the rest of the UK, which is our biggest single market and most important trading partner, and we would be cut off from it in the event of independence.

The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):

Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I am running out of time.

Let us think about what that would do to key sectors of our economy. If anyone needs any further convincing, they need only to look at this morning's Fraser of Allander economic commentary. The backdrop is that economic growth has been slow. Gross domestic product has risen only 2 per cent in the past decade, and many households are worse off. On Brexit and a second independence referendum, the Fraser of Allander Institute says that

"the current level of such uncertainty is unprecedented. It is also different from normal in that the debates around Brexit and a possible further independence referendum concern the fundamental basis on which the Scottish economy has grown and developed over the last 40 years."

Do we seriously want to tear apart 40 years of progress?

A second independence referendum will cause huge uncertainty. Businesses tell us so, economists tell us so, investors tell us so. It would be economic vandalism on a huge scale and I implore the Government to please stop posturing and get on with the day job.

15:48

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West)

(Con): Today, we could be debating our crippled NHS, our failing education system, our lagging Scottish economy or any of the other achievements of a decade of SNP rule. Even this morning, I was contacted by parents who are concerned about the closure of their nursery in Westhill. However, here we are again, debating a constitutional question that we have already answered.

"Times have changed," cries the SNP, and "We didn't know about the EU vote in 2014"—and so we come to the first of many uncomfortable truths that the SNP faces. Page 279 of its white paper says:

"Scotland faces the possibility of leaving the EU because of Westminster's planned in/out European referendum."

Therefore, despite the SNP's protestations, it did know about the possibility of Brexit. Now, the supposed "material change" is that we are leaving the European Union but, if that is the case, it is only thanks to the SNP. Not only did it spend less money campaigning against Brexit than it did on the Glenrothes by-election, but hundreds of thousands of its supporters voted to leave.

There is the second unfortunate truth for the SNP as it tries to appeal to remain voters: the SNP is more Eurosceptic than anyone in our Scottish

Conservative Party. Both north and south of the border, Opposition parties call us the Brexiteers, but the truth is that the largest party to vote to leave was Labour in England and the SNP in Scotland. The Conservative Party has done nothing more than facilitate the democratic rights of Labour and SNP supporters, and we will respect their wish to leave Europe.

John Mason: Will the member at least accept that the timing of the Brexit referendum was wrong, because it was immediately after the Scottish Parliament and other elections, which prevented all of us in all of the parties from really getting involved?

Alexander Burnett: I do not agree with that point, I am afraid.

To go back to 2014, my electoral region, Aberdeenshire, voted overwhelmingly to stay in the UK—also by a majority of more than 60 per cent. Is the vote of those people somehow considered different from Scotland's vote on Brexit? Will the First Minister guarantee in her referendum that Aberdeenshire and 27 other regions will not be taken out of the UK against their will by Glasgow and Dundee?

Andy Wightman: At the 2015 election, Alexander Burnett stood for Aberdeenshire West on a manifesto that included safeguarding British interests in the single market. It said:

"We say: yes to the Single Market"

and

"We benefit from the Single Market",

and spoke about wanting to preserve

"the integrity of the Single Market".

It even said:

"we want to expand the Single Market".

How is that going?

Alexander Burnett: I am very optimistic that it will go as well as it will. Since then, we have had a referendum and the people have spoken; now the Government in Westminster must deliver.

And what about another uncomfortable truth, about the value of our oil? In 2013, we were told that it would fund the SNP's obsession, with Alex Salmond predicting \$150 a barrel. Now, he sits on Bloomberg saying that Scotland only needs oil prices to be at \$60. However, today, oil sits at \$51—a price decided by a group of countries in the middle east. Is that what the SNP means by taking back control?

The fact is that the economic argument was lost even with oil at \$100 a barrel. The subsequent collapse in revenues would have been disastrous for an independent Scotland had we voted yes in

2014. The SNP should realise that this relentless talk of another referendum will only lead to more job cuts and threaten investment in the North Sea. Those are not my words, but those of respected global energy analysts Wood Mackenzie last Friday. Would the SNP give up the broad shoulders of our United Kingdom, which supports our industry with a city deal, £2.3 billion of fiscal reforms and the highest tax cuts ever seen?

The SNP would like us to believe that this is an unpleasant and un-needed union. It says, "Stop the world, Scotland wants to get on." However, I say to it that we are already on, and look what we have achieved together. We have ended slavery, fascism and dictatorships. The SNP forgets that Britain was called the "workshop of the world". From the industrial revolution to the internet and everything in between, our shared inventiveness has changed the world over and over again for the better.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I hear what the member is saying but, given that we are living under austerity and people are being left destitute by the Tory Government, do those broad shoulders not seem just a little bit slopey?

Alexander Burnett: I note the comment, but I think that if the people of Scotland want 10 years of austerity max, that is what they will get with another referendum.

Why let facts get in the way of a good grievance? As one commentator put it, if the SNP won the lottery, it would moan about the price of a ticket. It is not up to SNP members when we have referendums: they are not Scotland; they have no majority; and they have no mandate. No, they will get this vote through Parliament tonight only thanks to the Greens—a party whose candidates collectively got fewer constituency votes than I did in Aberdeenshire West. The Greens are another party with no mandate for a referendum but which will blindly follow the SNP where directed. Will Mark Ruskell be happy to see the end of renewable energy subsidies, which are funded by consumers across the whole of the UK? Will Ross Greer be happy to see austerity max?

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

Alexander Burnett: Will John Finnie be happy to see the end of contracts for difference for the islands and their wind? Will Alison Johnstone be happy to see the end of the Barnett formula? Will Andy Wightman be happy to give up on localism—

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

Alexander Burnett: —join the euro and send control of our economy to Brussels? Will Patrick

Harvie remember his pledge of a million-strong petition?

Meeting closed at 15:57.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a close, please.

Alexander Burnett: Will they ever gain their voters' trust again, or are they still a million miles from credibility?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: When members go far over their speaking times, it disadvantages other members.

15:55

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): My comments this afternoon are drawn from conversations with family members, friends, neighbours and even a few taxi drivers. Why? In the words of Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic:

“Genuine politics—politics worthy of the name, and the only politics I am willing to devote myself to—is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community, and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility”.

That responsibility weighs heavily on me, and I know that it weighs heavily on my colleagues on all sides of the chamber. Yet, despite what I believe is our common purpose to serve, there are differences of opinion, in this chamber and beyond this chamber. It is a privilege to engage—

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Ms Forbes, I am sorry to interrupt—I gather that you have just started.

Members, as well as members of the public, will probably be aware from social media and news reports that they are following on their phones that there has been a serious incident at Westminster and that the Parliament at Westminster has been locked down because of security concerns.

I certainly have no wish to cause undue alarm, and security here has been increased but, as I am aware and as the business managers and I have discussed, the fact that our sister Parliament has had a serious incident is affecting this debate and is affecting the contribution of members. For that reason, we have decided to close the sitting and we will find time to resume this debate—*[Applause.]* Thank you. We will resume the debate and be able to have it in a full and frank manner, but I think that to continue at the moment would not allow members to make their contributions in the manner that they would wish to.

I will close the debate, and we will circulate information to members about when chamber business will be resumed. Thank you very much.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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