



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Thursday 20 April 2017

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 April 2017

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

National Health Service Workforce (Morale)

1. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of NHS workforce morale. (S5O-00878)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland recognise the importance of an engaged, valued and motivated workforce and the fact that better staff experience can lead to better patient care. Following continuous partnership dialogue over the past 18 months, we agreed with the trade unions that, through the iMatter continuous improvement model, our approach to measuring staff experience will be greatly improved. That will allow us to better understand and take action on issues that matter to staff.

Full implementation is due to be completed by the end of the year and we expect the 2017 NHS Scotland national staff experience report to be available in early 2018. Reports of previous NHS Scotland staff surveys are published online.

Anas Sarwar: The Government has overseen a workforce crisis, with 2,500 nursing vacancies in the NHS, which represents a 300 per cent increase in long-term vacancies. Nurses tell us that only one in three of them believe that there are enough of them to enable them to do their jobs properly. Nine out of 10 nurses say that their workload has got worse, and now the cabinet secretary has imposed a 1 per cent pay cap.

The Royal College of Nursing tells us that, after seven years of pay restraint, that cap represents a 14 per cent real-terms pay cut. Why does the cabinet secretary think that it is okay for members of the Scottish Parliament and members of Parliament to get an inflationary pay rise while NHS nurses get a real-terms pay cut?

Shona Robison: We have record levels of staff in the NHS in Scotland. Given the number of posts that have been created, there are some challenging vacancy levels. We are working hard with boards to address that and to address issues such as reducing the use of agency nurses in order to fill substantive posts. A lot of work is going on and we have record levels of staff—particularly nursing staff—in our NHS.

We recognise that pay restraint has been difficult. However, it was the unions and the Royal College of Nursing in particular that wanted an independent pay review body to set pay, and that has been in place for a number of years. The independent pay review body recommended 1 per cent, which the Scottish Government accepted.

We have accepted independent pay review body recommendations when other parts of the United Kingdom have not. That has led to the current situation where Scottish nurses who are in band 5, for example, are paid between £227 and £312 per year more than their English counterparts. In Scotland, we have a commitment to no compulsory redundancies, which is not in place in other parts of these islands.

We are determined to engage with the RCN and others on pay. During the budget process, I heard no recommendations or representations about pay from Labour. Labour members come here and say one thing now, but they said nothing about that during the budget process.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): How have staff representatives, such as the RCN, been involved in the development of the new iMatter system for addressing staff experience? For the benefit of members, I note that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport.

Shona Robison: Our new approach to staff experience has been developed over several years and has been formed by staff as well as trade union representatives. The aim is to ensure that the measurement of staff experience is meaningful and that staff have ownership of the actions that stem from that.

An associate director of RCN Scotland, Norman Provan, recently said that our approach has strengthened

“the process by which staff can have their say”.

We take such matters forward in partnership with the unions, which have been fully involved. I am happy to keep Fulton MacGregor informed of the progress of iMatter.

College Lecturers (Strikes)

2. **Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what contingencies are in place to mitigate the impact on students, particularly those with upcoming exams, of reported planned strikes by college lecturers. (S5O-00879)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I am pleased to note today's news that the Colleges Scotland employers association

and the Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers Association have jointly decided to refer their dispute to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. I hope that that will encourage both sides to work constructively to reach a resolution. Although the union has a mandate for strike action, I hope that it will consider postponing such action while the ACAS process is in train.

The Colleges Scotland employers association has issued comprehensive guidance on the practical steps that colleges should take, in the event of strike action going ahead, to mitigate the risk of disruption to students. It includes guidance on what colleges can do to ensure that no student's exam diet is disrupted.

Ross Thomson: I welcome that good news and the good progress that has been made. However, will the minister acknowledge that there are still serious concerns in the sector about college funding and the sustainability of colleges, as well as a genuine concern about the 54 per cent reduction in part-time and flexible courses between 2007 and 2016, and that those concerns need to be addressed properly?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In challenging financial times, the 2017-18 budget for colleges will increase resource and capital funding by £41.4 million—that is a 7.4 per cent increase in cash terms. In addition, we have increased our college capital spending in the budget. I recognise that these are challenging times, as Ross Thomson highlights, and we are delivering for the college sector.

Mr Thomson referred to the types of college places that are available. We fund part-time and full-time college courses; we are focusing on courses for which people receive a recognised qualification that will enhance their prospects of going directly into a job and being successful in the job market.

Education Benefits (Uptake)

3. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to automating some benefits, such as school clothing grants, free school meals and the education maintenance allowance, to increase the uptake by those most in need. (S5O-00880)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The automation of benefits is a matter for local authorities to decide on after taking into account local needs and priorities. The Scottish Government is always keen to see improvements in the delivery and take-up of passported benefits, which local authorities and other public bodies handle.

Pauline McNeill: The poorest in Scotland are missing out on £2 billion of unclaimed benefits each year. Last year, Glasgow City Council ran a scheme to automate the school clothing grant, which meant that it could send £52 per child to each family. The council's financial inclusion team cites as some of the biggest reasons why people do not claim their benefits the complexity of forms, language difficulties and worries about losing other benefits.

Notwithstanding the cabinet secretary's comment that the automation of benefits is the responsibility of local authorities, will he commit to talking to authorities such as Glasgow City Council to get a better understanding of how successful such schemes have been? Will he consider that there is quite a compelling case for the Government to place a duty on councils or to look at the matter in the context of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill? If we can get more people to claim the benefits to which they are entitled, and if we look at the reasons why people are not claiming those benefits, we can take more people out of poverty.

John Swinney: I am happy to associate myself and the Government with the substance and purpose of Pauline McNeill's question. It is important that, in all circumstances, individuals can receive the benefits to which they are properly and fully entitled.

I am aware that, in some circumstances, individuals are not claiming benefits to which they are entitled and which could make a material difference to their lives. I would be happy to talk to Glasgow City Council and other authorities about how we strengthen and improve the take-up of individual benefits.

We are entering a period in which we will exercise more responsibility for a range of integrated benefits within the competence that the Scottish Government has. I am happy to engage with Pauline McNeill and others on the matter because it is clear to me, from exercises that we have looked at—for example, in connection with the cost of the school day—that there are significant financial burdens for families and that the more we can do to support individuals, the better.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 4 was not lodged.

Glasgow Kelvin College (Sale of Stow College)

5. **Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update regarding Glasgow Kelvin College's request to retain £3 million from the sale of the Stow College building. (S5O-00882)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The board of Glasgow Kelvin College achieved £6 million from the sale of the former Stow College building. There was initial agreement to retain £3 million of those proceeds to support the capital estate requirements in the Glasgow Kelvin board area. Following a consultation between the Scottish Government and the Glasgow Kelvin College board of management, a further £1 million has been retained by the college, bringing the total retained proceeds to £4 million.

Adam Tomkins: I am grateful to the minister for that answer. Glasgow Kelvin College serves some of the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland and 65 per cent of its learners come from the 20 per cent most deprived communities in the Glasgow region. The £3 million could and should have been invested in the college's own estate and capital equipment to meet the needs of existing learners and, crucially, to increase the levels of participation of those from deprived areas. Instead, the Scottish Government disregarded decision makers on the ground and cross-subsidised another education institution in a different part of Scotland altogether. Will the minister reconsider that decision and can she advise whether that transfer of resources is now set to become common practice in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Adam Tomkins might be aware of what is going on in Glasgow Kelvin College, but he is being rather disingenuous with some of the detail. I will quote part of a letter that I received from the chair of the board of management on 24 March 2017, in which he

"welcomes that the Scottish Government has recognised and supported the work of the College by allocating these resources which will enable learners to access industry standard equipment to provide them with the skills needed for sustainable employment in STEM related industries."

I have visited the college and have seen the fantastic work that it does with the learners to whom Mr Tomkins referred. I will be more than happy to continue dialogue with the college over the years ahead.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Of course, Mr Tomkins's party is responsible for much of that deprivation and, unlike me, Mr Tomkins has had no discussions with the principal of Glasgow Kelvin College.

I thank the minister for responding positively to my concerns about the issue for Glasgow Kelvin College and working with me and the college to resolve the matter successfully, with an additional £1 million being secured for the college, which has welcomed that outcome. What are the statutory

arrangements for the treatment of such capital receipts in the college sector more generally? Has such treatment been applied to other sectors? How much has the Scottish Government invested in recent years in improving the estates within Glasgow colleges?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I recognise the work that Bob Doris has done with me and the college over the issue, and I welcomed the discussions that I had with him. The statutory arrangements for capital disposals in the further education sector are covered in the statutory powers under section 18(5) of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992. Disposal of assets in other sectors would be dealt with in line with the conditions that are set out in the "Scottish Public Finance Manual".

Bob Doris rightly points to the investment that the Scottish Government has made in the college estate in Glasgow: £272 million in buildings in the college estate, including the Riverside campus, the City campus and Langside College buildings; and, of course, £16 million for capital maintenance. This Government has a proud record of delivering for Glasgow and the college estate in Scotland.

Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Sector)

6. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that homes in the private rented sector are energy efficient. (S5O-00883)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): We have designated energy efficiency as a national infrastructure priority, recognising its key role in tackling fuel poverty and meeting our ambitious climate change targets. Private renting now makes up 14 per cent of Scotland's homes and is an increasingly important housing option for many people in Scotland. The sector has the highest proportion of the least energy-efficient stock and it is only fair that tenants who rent privately have access to a good-quality and energy-efficient home.

Our home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland schemes provide support for householders across all tenures, including the private rented sector, and we have just published a consultation on proposals that would mean that all private rented homes in Scotland would be required to meet a minimum standard of energy efficiency. The consultation seeks views on requiring all private rented sector properties to have a minimum energy performance certificate rating of E at a change in tenancy from 2019, rising to EPC level D from 2022.

Emma Harper: The British Lung Foundation Scotland has said that cold, damp and mouldy

homes can cause or exacerbate illnesses, including lung diseases, which places additional strain on our health and social services. Will the minister take into account the health benefits for private sector tenants of the improved energy efficiency of their homes when he considers the response to the consultation?

Kevin Stewart: The Scottish Government already recognises the importance of energy efficiency measures in helping individuals to feel healthier and to live in warmer homes that are cheaper to heat. I encourage any tenant who has any issue with dampness to report it immediately to their landlord. Both social and private landlords have a responsibility to ensure that the homes that their tenants live in are in a good state of repair and, under the statutory minimum tolerable standard for all housing, homes must be substantially free from rising or penetrating damp.

On our current consultation, we very much welcome views from all stakeholders including landlords, tenants and other interested parties such as the British Lung Foundation Scotland, and we will, of course, consider carefully all views that are expressed in response to the consultation.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): We welcome the consultation, although it was a long time coming. Regulations that cover the private rented sector have already been introduced in England and Wales by the United Kingdom Government. The 2015 energy efficiency regulations will make it unlawful for landlords in England and Wales to grant a new lease of a property with an energy performance certificate rating below E from April next year. Will the Scottish Government study best practice from elsewhere in the UK before drawing up its proposals?

Kevin Stewart: As Mr Simpson said, the UK Government has set a minimum energy efficiency standard in England and Wales at EPC band E for the private rented sector from April 2018. Our start date of 1 April 2019 will allow landlords, assessors and installers time to prepare for minimum standards but, at the same time, ensure that tenants' homes are improved as soon as possible.

Our proposals also set out a trajectory to increase the standard over time, going beyond the current standard in England and Wales.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): What will be the Scottish Government's approach to rural, off-gas-grid rented properties, many of which have missed out on successive home energy efficiency schemes?

Kevin Stewart: We have certainly taken cognisance of some of the findings of the rural fuel poverty task force, and we have said that we will look at those houses that are off grid. As well as

information from the task force, I am pleased to have received information from organisations that are doing work on the ground, such as in east Sutherland. We will look closely at what those folks on the ground are finding and act accordingly.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): Why is there such a continuing delay in regulating energy efficiency in the owner-occupied sector? Some 59 per cent of those who are in fuel poverty live in that sector. As WWF indicated in its evidence on the draft climate change plan, the powers have been in existence since 2009. The idea was an enabling measure in the first report on proposals and policies, it was a concrete proposal in RPP 2 and it was developed with stakeholders to the detailed, pre-consultation phase in the previous session of Parliament. Under the current proposals, nothing will happen until at least 2019—a decade after the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Why is the Government so complacent in this regard?

Kevin Stewart: As Mr Wightman is well aware, we have set out a timetable for how we will deal with houses in owner occupation as part of the consultation that we published just the other week. We are adamant about ensuring that we get all the proposals absolutely right. I encourage folk to look at the current consultation on the private housing sector and respond accordingly, and we will then move on to looking at owner-occupied properties.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-01149)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: Last night, I was at an event in London, discussing the benefits of United Kingdom aid with Bill Gates. I have no idea where Mr Gates stands on our constitutional future, but here is what he said about the UK aid effort:

"You are the reason that malaria deaths are down in entire villages, and lifesaving vaccines are now reaching kids in the most remote parts of the world."

We are about to fight a general election campaign in which we know what the Scottish National Party's message will be; that living in the UK under a Conservative Government will be "hell on earth". Given the work that this country does around the world and the conditions that people face in other parts of the world, I ask the First Minister at the start of this campaign: does she really think that that is a fair description of life in this country?

The First Minister: Like Ruth Davidson, I support whole-heartedly the commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product on helping the world's poorest communities. It is something that the SNP argued for long before it was ever a Tory commitment.

I heard Bill Gates's comment last night. I also heard him in a number of interviews, and I heard him express concern, as others have expressed, that the Tory manifesto for the forthcoming election will drop the 0.7 per cent commitment. I welcome Ruth Davidson's commitment, but will she assure the chamber today that the commitment will be in the UK Tory manifesto for the next election? No Tory UK minister has yet been willing to give that.

On the wider issue of the election, I think that the key issue is: who is going to stand up for Scotland against an increasingly hardline Tory Government? The Prime Minister herself has made it very clear that in this election her objective is to crush dissent so that she can do whatever she wants. People across Scotland have to be clear: there is no safe tactical Tory vote at this election. We have seen the damage that Tories do with a small majority—[*Interruption.*] I know that they do not want to hear this, but with a small

majority, the Tories have cut Scotland's budget, have imposed the bedroom tax, the rape clause and cuts to disabled support and have robbed women of their pension entitlement. Let us think about the damage that a Tory Government could do with a bigger majority. If the thought of a one-party Tory stranglehold at Westminster horrifies, and if we want effective opposition in Scotland, that opposition can come only from the SNP.

Ruth Davidson: Theresa May herself gave the commitment to the aid budget when she was at the Department for International Development's East Kilbride headquarters, which administers aid all around the world.

Let us get back to the SNP's contribution. I quote:

"Hell on earth. Eternal damnation in a bottomless pit".

Those are direct quotes from the First Minister's back bencher Joan McAlpine, writing about life in the UK in a national newspaper this week. On the one hand, we have people such as Bill Gates talking about the brilliant work that his foundation is doing alongside British aid workers and the summit that his wife is hosting this summer with the UK Government to support millions more women and girls in getting access to contraception, and on the other, we have Nicola Sturgeon's colleagues writing offensive and negative trash about our country. Who does the First Minister stand with: Bill Gates or Joan McAlpine?

The First Minister: I will say a number of things to that. First, Ruth Davidson says that Theresa May has given the commitment. Well, the morning after she called the general election, Theresa May was on the radio and was challenged to commit to putting the 0.7 per cent commitment in the manifesto. She would not do it. She was challenged to do something else; she was challenged to say that the Tories would have a commitment to the triple lock on pensions in the manifesto, and she would not do that, either. I think that we should look very closely at the commitments that the Tories make and those that they do not make at this election.

Secondly, I support the work that DFID does around the world, and I am proud of the work that this Government does in Malawi and other countries around the world, too, helping women to get contraception as well as many other things. But do you know what I find utterly abhorrent? That, as DFID does things like that overseas, at home the Tory Government is forcing women to prove that they have been raped before they get access to benefits for their children.

I will give Ruth Davidson a chance to do today what she has shamefully refused to do so far. Do not pass the buck. Stand up here today, tell the

chamber and tell Scotland straight: do you support the rape clause in principle, or do you, like me, think it is utterly abhorrent? Answer the question.

Ruth Davidson: I will answer the question in the same way that I answered it in the press this morning: if the First Minister does not like the two-child tax policy, she can change it. But the truth is—

Members: Shame!

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Order.

Ruth Davidson: The truth is that the First Minister is always happier complaining about the UK Government than she is doing anything herself. The way that the SNP is readying itself to pour negativity on this country at this election is shameful.

She might not like it, but Scotland is part of this United Kingdom. If the First Minister really wants to set out her stall at this election, is a practical vision of how she is governing Scotland not the very least that we should all expect—or, given how education and the economy are going, is she banking on the fact that Scots just will not buy it?

The First Minister: Shame—shame on Ruth Davidson and shame on the Conservatives. We have just seen the true colours of Ruth Davidson and the Conservatives. Given the opportunity to stand up and clearly join others in the chamber to say that the rape clause—a clause that forces a woman to prove that she has been raped before claiming benefits for her children—is morally and in principle wrong, Ruth Davidson refuses to do so. That is utterly shameful. It brings into sharp focus the key issue at the heart of the general election.

I ask people to think about this. The rape clause has been introduced by a Tory Government at Westminster with a tiny majority. If that is what a Tory Government can do with a tiny majority, let us just think of the damage that an unfettered, out-of-control Tory Government can do with a bigger majority. If people in Scotland want protection against a Tory Government—

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Vote Labour!

The First Minister: If people in Scotland want an effective, strong opposition to a Tory Government, they will not get it from unelectable Labour, and they will not get it from the Lib Dems, who still say that they would support a Tory Government; they will only get it from the SNP, and Scotland needs protection from the Tories.

Ruth Davidson: In the weeks ahead, members on these benches will set out our vision of a United Kingdom that is a force for good in the world, and we will stand up for Scotland's decision

to stay in the United Kingdom. We will say no to a second referendum, so that Scotland can get on with building better schools and better public services.

What about the SNP's plans? The First Minister's very first intervention in the election has been to say that she would put Jeremy Corbyn in number 10. Is that because, uniquely, the First Minister sees in Mr Corbyn the wisdom, the foresight and the leadership skills that are needed in a Prime Minister, or could it possibly be because, in his own words, Jeremy Corbyn is "absolutely fine" with another referendum on independence? Is that the alliance that she was really seeking when she was down in London?

The First Minister: This is pretty tired stuff from the Tories. We only have to take one look at the polls to know that Jeremy Corbyn ain't going anywhere near number 10 Downing Street—on his own or with the help of anybody else.

That brings us back to the core issue. Because of the unelectability of Labour, Scotland faces the prospect of an unfettered, out-of-control Tory Government, and we know the damage that that can do to Scotland, to our budget, to the vulnerable, to pensions and to our economy. That is the choice for Scotland—to vote SNP to make sure that Scotland's voice is heard and that Scotland has protection against the Tories. The problem for Ruth Davidson, as she has clearly set out today, is that Scotland knows the Tory vision for Scotland—the rape clause, penalising the vulnerable, taking Motability vehicles away from disabled people. People across Scotland know the vision and the programme of the Tories, and that is why people in Scotland know that if they want protection against that Tory vision, they must vote SNP.

Engagements

2. **Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-01142)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: In recent weeks, the First Minister has joined me in calling out the Tories on the horrific rape clause. She has accused Theresa May of seeking to undermine devolution and she has said that the Tories are taking us off a cliff edge with hard Brexit, and she has just told us that we have seen the damage that a Tory Government can do, so why did the Scottish National Party abstain yesterday, instead of voting with Labour to get rid of the Tory Government?

The First Minister: I hate to be the one who has to point it out to Kezia Dugdale, but it was not

the SNP that voted with the Tories yesterday in the House of Commons. It was Labour members who trooped through the lobby with the Tories. She knows the lobby I mean: it was the one that had “turkeys” and “Christmas” written above it. The idea that in this election Labour will replace the Tories is, frankly, pie in the sky. The issue and the threat at this election is that, due to Labour’s complete unelectability, we face an unfettered, out-of-control Tory Government. We know that the Prime Minister wants to silence opposition, so the question for Scotland is this: if people want a strong opposition to the Tories, if they want MPs who will stand up and be a voice for Scotland, then the only party to support at this election is this one, the SNP.

Kezia Dugdale: Labour members of Parliament voted yesterday to get rid of the miserable Tory Government. Imagine my surprise when the SNP MPs did not do the same. The First Minister has said that she wants an honest debate, so let us have it. It suits the SNP for the Tories to stay in power. That is why SNP MPs refused to vote Theresa May out of office yesterday, and every day that the Tories remain in power 430,000 Scots go without a real living wage, Women Against State Pension Inequality go without the pension that they have worked their whole lives for, and young people have their housing benefit stripped away. It suits the SNP for the Tories to stay in power, because the only thing that the SNP has ever cared about is independence. Will the First Minister tell us what is more important on 8 June, kicking the Tories out of office or having another divisive referendum?

The First Minister: Jeremy Corbyn is unelectable and will leave Labour carping from the sidelines. How do we know that? Because that is what Kezia Dugdale said about Jeremy Corbyn. I agree with Kezia Dugdale about how awful and how damaging the Tory Government is. That is why I think that it is so utterly shameful and disgraceful that Labour has allowed itself to get into a position where the Tories are 20 points ahead of them in the opinion polls UK-wide, and are even ahead of them in Scotland. That is Labour’s failure and it is an utter disgrace.

That brings us back to the core point at stake in the election. The only thing standing between an out-of-control, unfettered Tory Government and Scotland is the SNP. If the people want to make sure that the Tory Government can be held to account, if they want to make sure that there is a strong focus for Scotland and if they want to make sure that Scotland is protected against exactly the policies that Kezia Dugdale talks about, they must ensure that they send back SNP MPs to Westminster.

Kezia Dugdale: In 2015, the First Minister told Scotland to vote SNP to keep the Tories out. How is that going? I say to her in all seriousness that if Jeremy Corbyn were Prime Minister there would be no rape clause, no more housing benefit cuts and no more austerity. I will proudly campaign for that over the next six weeks as she campaigns for independence.

The last time that we voted in a general election, Nicola Sturgeon said this:

“I have made it very clear that if you vote SNP in this election, that is not a vote for independence, nor is it a vote for another referendum.”

Time and again, we were told that a vote for the SNP was not a vote for another referendum. Will the First Minister have the decency to tell the voters before they vote that she will use this election as another excuse for a divisive referendum—or, once again, will she wait until the day after?

The First Minister: The mandate for another referendum was sought and won at the Scottish Parliament elections last year. This election is about who will stand up for Scotland against the Tories. It is about who will stop the Tories silencing and crushing the Opposition.

Kezia Dugdale has the nerve to stand up and somehow blame the SNP for the fact that the—eh—Tories did not lose the election. [*Interruption.*] I am almost speechless that the SNP is to blame for the fact that the Tories won the election in 2015. It was Labour’s fault. If Labour had won every seat in Scotland, it would still have lost to the Tories across the UK. Labour is unelectable and utterly useless. That is the tragedy of UK politics right now.

That brings us back to the central point. I ask every voter to think about this seriously. The Tories want people to think that there is a safe, tactical Tory vote that they can cast in the election, but every single Tory vote cast in Scotland will help Theresa May make sure that she has the ability to do whatever she wants to do. If people do not want an out-of-control Tory Government, if people want protection, a strong Opposition and a strong voice against the Tories, they have to make sure that they vote SNP in Scotland.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-01145)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: The Scottish National Party’s deputy leader, Angus Robertson, struggled to explain his party’s Europe policy on the radio

yesterday. Five times, he was asked what policy would be in the general election manifesto. Five times he was asked, and five times he was not able to answer. He became so desperate that he even asked all the listeners to write in with suggestions. It was answers on a postcard, so the First Minister has a chance to influence the policy. Does she want full membership of the European Union to be in the SNP manifesto?

The First Minister: The SNP's policy on Europe is absolutely clear. We want Scotland to remain a member of the European Union. I do not think that anyone could have missed that over the past few months.

It is interesting that Willie Rennie somehow tries to criticise me when I say that I want Scotland and the United Kingdom to remain in the EU but that it is important that we prioritise membership of the single market. It is interesting that he criticises me for that, because that is what Tim Farron, his own leader, says. He wants the UK to stay in the European single market—the priority is staying in the single market.

There is no doubt about my policy. I want Scotland to remain in the EU. The doubt is about what on earth the Liberal Democrat policy is on this—or any other—matter.

Willie Rennie: If the policy is that clear, why can the First Minister not just say that it will be in the manifesto? That would be clear. She is dodging, just like Angus Robertson was yesterday.

The Liberal Democrats, in contrast, are crystal clear. We want Scotland in the heart of the United Kingdom, and the United Kingdom in the heart of Europe. The general election is a chance to change the course of the whole United Kingdom. The more Liberal Democrat MPs that are elected, the greater the chance that we have of changing the direction of the country.

Just like she did in the moment when she joined the Scottish National Party all those years ago, the First Minister only cares about independence. She has only ever cared about that. We know what she and her Government are up to. She is trying to get Brexit supporters back on side, so she is going soft on Europe. It is fair to ask whether EU membership will be in the manifesto, so what is the First Minister's answer? Will she tell us?

The First Minister: Let me try in simpler words: I support membership of the European Union. Surely even Willie Rennie can understand that.

There was another politician dodging questions yesterday, was there not? I saw Tim Farron challenged in the House of Commons by Stewart McDonald, who is one of my excellent colleagues in Westminster. Tim Farron was challenged by

Stewart McDonald to rule out supporting a Tory Government, and he refused to do so.

There we have it: Labour is unelectable and the Liberal Democrats propped the Tories up for five years and will not rule out doing it again. If people want Scotland's voice to be heard against the Tories, if they want Scotland to be protected against the Tories and if they want a party that stands up against the Tories, there is only one party that will do that: the SNP.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): How is the Scottish Government standing up for human rights in the face of Tory attempts to scrap the Human Rights Act 1998?

The First Minister: We will oppose vigorously any attempt to scrap the 1998 act. We know that if the Tories get their way, scrapping it is exactly what they want to do, which makes it all the more ironic that Ruth Davidson is talking about work overseas. One of the worst things that the UK could do and the worst message that it could send internationally is to be seen to roll back on human rights. The SNP will always oppose that and always stand up for human rights.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the First Minister confirm that airport expansion, new flight routes and the scrapping of air passenger duty are all Government policy? Does she agree that it is rank hypocrisy for members of the Scottish Parliament, MPs and Government ministers to pretend to their constituents that they oppose those policies, when all the while they compliantly voted them through in Cabinet?

The First Minister: I want Scotland to have the best possible connections with the rest of the world, because that is good for not just people in Scotland but our businesses that are seeking to expand and export more overseas, so I make no apology for wanting our aviation connections and other transport connections to be as good as they possibly can be. I am also very clear about our responsibility to tackle climate change. This Government and, indeed, this Parliament should be proud of the world-leading action that we are taking to tackle climate change.

United States (Visit)

4. Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether she will provide an update on her visit to the United States. (S5F-01158)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes. I visited the United States between 2 and 7 April, attending events and meetings in California and New York. The visit focused on trade and investment, boosting tourism, sharing best practice across the public and private sectors, and promoting Scottish innovation, entrepreneurship

and culture. The relationship between Scotland and America is an important one, with deep and long-standing ties that are reflected by the strong economic, cultural and personal links of our citizens. The visit was an important opportunity to assure businesses and visitors from the US that Scotland is an outward-looking and welcoming country that remains very open for business.

Maree Todd: I was particularly pleased to see that climate action was high on the agenda, with the First Minister signing a climate deal with the Governor of California. In the Highlands and Islands and throughout Scotland, renewables are transforming communities, creating employment and helping us meet our climate targets. While the Tories at Westminster trash subsidies for green energy, how can we continue to meet our global obligations to tackle climate change in partnership with allies around the world?

The First Minister: It is important to stress that Scotland is making huge progress in delivering our climate change ambitions, but we still have much to achieve.

In the US, I met the Governor of California to discuss how our two Administrations can work together to achieve our shared ambition of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and we pledged to cut emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. We discussed the importance of offshore wind power in tackling climate change and agreed to share knowledge and best practice in developing that technology. We also offered to help the Under2 Coalition, which represents more than 1 billion people, to prepare for a major summit in 2018 that is aimed at persuading national governments to increase their efforts to tackle climate change.

There is no doubt that many of the policies of the current United Kingdom Government fly in the face of our efforts to tackle climate change, which is another reason why it is so important that we continue to have voices in Westminster arguing for policies that will support us and not hinder us in meeting those ambitions.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I was amused to see the First Minister under a banner that described her as “Queen of Scots”—which is not quite how I hear her being described nearer to home.

The Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Paul Ryan, is currently in London and has made it clear that the United States Government wishes to come to an expedited trade arrangement with the United Kingdom when we leave the European Union. When the First Minister was in the United States, what formal discussions did she have with the Government of the United States about future trade relationships? What

assurances did she give the US Government that the Scottish Government would do everything that it could to ensure that an early trade deal is arrived at?

The First Minister: I am glad that Jackson Carlaw watched the “Women in the World” summit that he mentioned, and I hope that he also heard the gasps of horror from the very large audience that was listening at the summit when I outlined the rape clause policy that has come into effect—

Jackson Carlaw: The First Minister misrepresented the policy.

The First Minister: Jackson Carlaw says that I misrepresented the policy, so let me set it out very clearly for members. The rape clause policy puts an obligation on a woman to prove that she has been raped if she wants to claim tax credits for more than two children. If Jackson Carlaw thinks that that is a misrepresentation, I invite him to come to the chamber and tell members exactly what the rape clause policy entails, and to do what Ruth Davidson failed to do, which was to have the courage to say that it is morally reprehensible to have such a policy on the statute book.

I met a number of business representatives and other economic interests in the United States—

Jackson Carlaw: The US Government.

The First Minister: I did not have meetings with the US Government; the visit was focused on trade and investment. In every conversation and visit, the message was clear that Scotland remains open for business. Given the Tories’ Brexit obsession, it is all the more important that we get that message out in not just the United States, but in every country in the world.

School Building Defects

5. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to reports of defects found in school buildings. (S5F-01162)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The health, safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff when at school are of paramount importance. Following the publication of the “Report on the Independent Inquiry into the Construction of Edinburgh Schools”, the Minister for Local Government and Housing wrote to all local authorities to highlight the issues raised and recommendations made by the report. The minister underlined the importance of adhering to building regulations, technical standards and the inspection processes that are in place to protect the public. The minister has also written to and met leaders in the construction industry to ensure that they are aware of the findings and recommendations in the report, and to ensure that

we can rely on quality workmanship and control processes.

Edward Mountain: I accept that local authorities have the statutory responsibility for school buildings, but following publication of the Edinburgh schools report, surely the Scottish Government has a duty to ensure that those responsibilities are deployed. That is why I raised with the First Minister on 26 January safety issues regarding the Wick high school campus, which she chose to sideline.

Why has it taken problems arising in 72 schools around Scotland for the Scottish Government to take the matter seriously? Will the First Minister provide an unequivocal guarantee that work is being done with local authorities to ensure that all school buildings in Scotland are safe?

The First Minister: There are a number of points to make.

I note that, later in First Minister's question time, Adam Tomkins will ask a question that challenges me to leave all responsibilities that are not specifically those of the Scottish Government to local authorities and not to interfere in local authorities' responsibilities, so the Conservatives have a bit of a consistency issue.

I accept that the Scottish Government has responsibilities, which is why I set out the action that it has taken. We did not wait for the independent report; we wrote, as I described, to local authorities shortly after the Oxfangs primary school situation arose last year. We acted promptly, as the public would have expected us to do.

It is also important to note that none of the schools that require remedial work was built under the Government's current schools programme; they are historical school-building projects. Nevertheless, we have to ensure that all school buildings are safe and that lessons from previous private finance initiative programmes are properly learned and implemented in the future. The Government is absolutely determined that we will discharge our responsibility to do so.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The schools in question were, of course, built by Labour and the Liberal Democrats under the PFI. The First Minister will know that in North Ayrshire the Labour-run council built four new schools a decade ago, with construction costs of £81 million. Between 2007 and 2037, £401 million will have to be paid in unitary charges to the companies that built them, which includes £12.7 million this year. That is the equivalent of buying an £81,000 flat, paying a mortgage of £1,114 a month for 30 years, then not even owning it at the end of those 30 years.

Does the First Minister agree that Labour's reckless handling of our public finances while it was in office continues to rob North Ayrshire and much of Scotland of funds that could have been put towards delivering better local services, and that it is high time that Labour apologised for the legacy of incompetence that it has left our schools, North Ayrshire Council and other local authorities throughout Scotland?

The First Minister: Yes, I do agree. It is fair to point out that the report says that the financing method was not in itself responsible for the defective construction, although it states that implementation of contracts by the partners involved could have been stronger. Questions really must be asked and, in due course, answered about old PFI contracts, which many people at the time feared were putting profits before quality. The costs of Labour's disastrous PFI deals are still taking significant sums of money away from vital public services.

The Government is determined to secure maximum value for money in existing PFI contracts. The Scottish Futures Trust has worked on behalf of ministers for some time with public bodies to identify the scope to improve the efficiency and performance of those contracts. That work will continue.

The whole episode has raised serious questions about previous Labour Administrations, so perhaps one day Labour will have to answer them and—yes—apologise.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The issue has had a distinct impact on my constituency. A year ago, the pupils at St Peter's RC primary school had to go elsewhere and Liberton high school had to host pupils from neighbouring Gracemount high school. Dozens of families who send their children to Oxfangs primary school live in my constituency. The underlying issue was the failure of contractors to install tie rods in the walls of the school buildings; that failure was not picked up by building control. We have learned that scores of school buildings across Scotland have similar structural faults that building control has failed to pick up. It is clear that there are issues around the sign-off procedure, how building control works and, fundamentally, the safety checks. What changes to, and reviews of, the building control process and regime will there be?

The First Minister: That is a very fair question, and I want to respond to two aspects of it.

First, I recognise the disruption that was caused for pupils across Edinburgh last year. The independent report says that the negative educational impact on children

"is likely to have been relatively limited",

but that does not take away from the disruption and concern that pupils and parents experienced last year—especially older pupils who had to sit exams. Everybody deeply regrets that.

Secondly, we have to reflect very carefully on the scrutiny of work and building control processes, and ensure that there is an appropriate level of independent scrutiny of building work. The Government is reviewing all existing guidance on appropriate supervision in contract management so that we can be assured that best practice is available as a matter of course in all construction projects. The schools were not built, in the main, under the Government, but that does not change the fact that, as the incumbent Government now, we have to ensure that the right lessons are learned and that those lessons are applied in the future. We are absolutely determined to do that.

Sexually Exploitative Behaviour (Private Rented Housing)

6. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports of sexually exploitative behaviour in the private rented housing sector. (S5F-01166)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I was extremely concerned—horrified, actually—to read the reports that the member refers to. The Minister for Local Government and Housing has already written to the website that hosted the adverts, asking it to take action. As a Government, we are already taking action to tackle such issues through the implementation of equally safe, which is our strategy to tackle any violence against women and girls. We are also taking action to improve the availability of and access to housing for everyone, and action to tackle the poverty and inequality that can so often render people vulnerable to being exploited in such a way.

Any person always has the right to refuse to consent to sexual activity. Forcing someone—in any way—to participate in sexual activity is a crime. We continue to keep all laws under review to ensure that they are fit for purpose in tackling these unacceptable behaviours.

Claire Baker: We know that sex for rent adverts have been posted online for properties in Scotland, but we have no way of knowing how many tenants are currently in such arrangements. As the First Minister says, the practice opens the door to vulnerable tenants, who are often facing homelessness and poverty and who find themselves in commercially exploitative arrangements.

I welcome the First Minister's reports of the action that is being taken by the Minister for Local Government and Housing, but I ask her what

action the Government will take to ensure that any landlords who are found to be offering such arrangements are properly dealt with. More specifically, what action is being taken through the equally safe project? Has the Government had time to have discussions with any groups that support vulnerable women who seek accommodation, to raise awareness of such exploitative practices?

The First Minister: Let me assure the member that we will look carefully at what action we can take, further to what we are already doing, across all those areas. The minister will be very happy to meet the member to discuss that in more detail, if that would be of interest to her.

The member raises particularly the situation of landlords. Where they behave unacceptably, clearly there are provisions to seek to deal with that. I suspect that, in cases such as the one that she highlights, often the problem will be that there is no formal tenancy agreement. They will be informal arrangements, which does not make them any more acceptable—in fact, much less so—but sometimes that will be one of the challenges. They are not formal arrangements in which there is a recognised or registered landlord. Nevertheless, the issues are serious. There are wider issues involved, but I will undertake to ensure that the minister considers all the suggestions that the member makes, and the offer of a meeting stands if she wishes to take it up.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The First Minister acknowledges that not all such circumstances will involve registered landlords. However, in order to register, landlords must comply with a fit-and-proper-person test. Is it not pretty clear that any such exploitative arrangements should lead to an automatic fail of such a test, and revocation of any existing landlord registration?

The First Minister: My simple and straightforward answer to that question is yes. I struggle to see how anybody who placed an advert of this description would pass the fit-and-proper-person test. Patrick Harvie and other members will be aware that there is a proper statutory legal process that local authorities must go through before they can take landlord status away from somebody, and I could not, in any situation, pre-empt that. However, we are all agreed on the unacceptability of the examples that have been brought to the chamber's attention, so, just as I did in reply to the member who spoke previously, I will undertake to discuss this with the relevant minister, to make sure that the Scottish Government is taking whatever appropriate action we are able to take.

Local Authorities (Devolution)

7. Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on Reform Scotland's view that local authorities should be responsible for all matters that are not specifically reserved to the Scottish Parliament. (S5F-01167)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, maybe the Tories should start practising what they preach occasionally on some of these issues.

Local authority responsibilities are set out very clearly. The focus of the Scottish Government is on encouraging councils to empower communities across the country. It is important that we do not consider just what power local authorities should have but also how local authorities then transfer more of their power to local communities. That is why our Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 puts additional powers into the hands of communities to hold their local authorities to account. We are also discussing with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities how to achieve our aim of having at least 1 per cent of council budgets decided in that way, building on the work of our £2 million community choices fund.

Adam Tomkins: Yesterday, we published our local government election manifesto, in which we argue that councils in Scotland should focus on growing their local economies. Cities in England, from the northern powerhouse to the midlands engine, are being given ample new powers to do just that. Can the First Minister identify even a single power that she would devolve from this Parliament to our cities to enable them to do the same?

The First Minister: Local authorities of course already have a power of general competence, so there is nothing standing in the way of them getting on with the job that they should be doing, which many are doing well, of growing their local economies. As the member is aware, the Government has promoted and delivered city deals, sometimes in partnership with the United Kingdom Government, so we are making sure that there is not only devolved power in the hands of local authorities but substantial additional investment at their disposal to do the things that support economic growth. We will continue to do that. I look forward to seeing many more city deals in the years ahead, not least in the city of Edinburgh and its surrounding areas.

I am a great believer in giving local authorities the powers and resources that they need to do the job in local communities, but I do not want to see those powers stop at local authorities, because real community empowerment is important, too, which is why the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is so important.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the Reform Scotland paper, which contains a lot with which Greens agree. We believe that local government should have far greater fiscal autonomy. Some weeks ago, we published our proposals for a fiscal framework between the Scottish Government and local government. Does the First Minister agree that, just as the Scottish Parliament is getting more fiscal autonomy and just as the Scottish Government has entered into a fiscal framework with the UK Government, so too should those relationships be mirrored with local government?

The First Minister: I think that there is some merit in that. Indeed, ahead of the Scottish elections last year, we indicated a willingness to talk to local authorities about what additional tax powers would lie better with them rather than with the Scottish Government. In fact, Scottish local authorities already have autonomy. For example, they have the ability to lower business rates, if they think that that would help to grow their economy. The Government is certainly willing to have that discussion. Obviously, we have local government elections in a couple of weeks' time and, after those elections—when we will, I hope, have new administrations in some parts of the country—we can take forward that discussion across the political spectrum and with council administrations the length and breadth of the country.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Back in 2007, the First Minister said that the council tax was unfair and that no amount of tinkering with it could make it fair. Does she believe today that the council tax is still unfair, or has the tinkering with the bands made it fairer?

The First Minister: Yes, the rebanding has made the council tax fairer.

I will say two things to Labour on that. First, during the first term of the Scottish National Party Administration, Labour blocked the abolition of the council tax. Therefore, it ill behoves Labour members to stand here and somehow argue for it. The second point that I would make about Labour's position on the council tax underlines the hypocrisy that is sometimes at the heart of its arguments. Labour's local government manifesto, which it published this week, says on page 6:

"The SNP council tax freeze has crippled local government".

As well as being complete nonsense, that statement is utter hypocrisy because, right now in Scotland, only eight council administrations are proposing a continuation of the council tax freeze and, guess what, every single one of those eight councils is Labour led. So there we have it—Labour might say one thing in the chamber about

the council tax, but its administrations across the country do the complete opposite.

International Workers Memorial Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I ask those who are leaving the chamber and the public gallery to do so quietly, as business in the Parliament is continuing.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-04358, in the name of Clare Haughey, on international workers memorial day 2017. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises International Workers Memorial Day on 28 April 2017, and every year, as a day to remember those who have lost their lives as a result of incidents at work, occupational disease or ill health, and as a day for the STUC, affiliated trade unions, Scottish Hazards, employers and enforcement agencies to reaffirm their commitment to making workplaces safer for workers today and in the future; notes that this year's theme is tackling inequalities in occupational health, a theme designed to raise awareness of poor health and safety in precarious employment and the so-called gig economy; considers that there is a need for workers in these areas to enjoy the trade union-effect where evidence shows that workers protected by trade unions are less likely to suffer injury; notes the benefits for employers and organisations already working with trade unions to strive for improved workplace health, safety and occupational health, and considers that effective and meaningful enforcement is vital in improving health and safety across Scottish workplaces.

12:45

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I am honoured to bring the motion to the Parliament for debate. International workers memorial day has been observed in Scotland on 28 April every year since 1992. The day is marked in a bid to remember the hundreds of thousands of people who are killed or injured in their work every year.

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a member of Unison and a former active trade unionist.

Workers memorial day was established in America in 1970; the April date was chosen to mark the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which came into force on that day. After workers memorial day was recognised in Canada in 1985, and in other parts of the world, it was brought to the United Kingdom by Tommy Hart in 1992.

Tommy Hart was a campaigner from the hazards campaign in the West Midlands. He was committed to workplace health, safety and welfare and to a reduction in the incidence of work-related injuries. He brought the memorial day to an event in Birmingham before it spread all over the UK.

Today, workers from all around the world and their representatives come together on 28 April to

demand action on better and safer conditions, to demonstrate and to honour those who have lost their lives at work. There is a phrase among those who observe international workers memorial day:

“Remember the dead, fight for the living”.

That is a powerful motto, and we are here today to do just that.

According to Unison, up to 50,000 people in the UK die from work-related ill health and incidents every year. In Scotland, our communities have suffered their share of those painful losses. In 1959, at Auchengeich colliery in North Lanarkshire, 47 miners lost their lives to a horrific combination of fire and carbon monoxide, deep below the surface. In my constituency, the Blantyre mining disaster in 1877 killed more than 200 workers in a similar explosion. Of course, in 1988, the Piper Alpha disaster claimed the lives of more than 160 workers and injured many more.

Such events not only cause death that could have been avoidable but rob communities of their fathers, wives, brothers, sisters and mothers. They leave scars that last a lifetime and beyond. In many other jobs, the risk might be less visible, but we need to remember that all work carries risk, whether we are talking about factory workers, lorry drivers, or the workers at TEPCO who had to work heroically in the aftermath of the meltdown at the Fukushima plant.

Around the world, one worker dies every 15 seconds. The numbers are comparable with the numbers of deaths worldwide from conditions such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s and lung and throat cancers. If those deaths were caused by crime, terrorism or disease we would be endlessly debating the issue in this Parliament and in wider public discourse. However, workplace deaths and injuries are more preventable than deaths from any of those conditions.

I am proud that we mark the work of the trade union movement in transforming the lives of ordinary working people in this country and others. As we experienced the first industrial revolution, the strides forward in practice and process were matched by the efforts and sacrifices of those in the trade union movement, who aimed to match technical innovations with progressive changes that protected ordinary people.

As the economy evolves to include more service-based and tertiary industries, the challenges will change and the nature of the risks to health will shift, but unionisation will be as vital as ever. The trade union movement must tackle the next big risks to workers’ wellbeing—inequalities, exploitative zero-hours-type contracts and the so-called gig economy, in which we see a shift or regression to piecemeal working.

As we move into the Uberisation of the workforce and as more take up the gig economy of one-off pieces of work, people are moving beyond the nine-to-five pattern of work. However, the reality for most in the gig economy is that it is just a rebranding of short-term contracts, which means zero job security and little right to the benefits that unionisation brings.

Zero-hours workers are relatively worse off now than they were a decade ago; they earn an average of one third less per hour than the average employee earns, which is down one quarter on 2006. The boom in self-employment masks similar figures. The average earnings of self-employed workers are 40 per cent lower than those of employees, compared with being 28 per cent lower a decade ago.

With lower incomes, more precarious work and a physical divide through remote working practices, the challenges for work safety and wellbeing are as serious as ever. Unfortunately, the Trade Union Act 2016 has made the environment more hostile for unions to operate in, with its 50 per cent turnout threshold for action to be legal, which is above and beyond winning the vote. A more draconian figure of 40 per cent support from the entire membership is required before public sector workers can take action.

Those steps and others seek to undermine the effectiveness of workers in organising and influencing work patterns. Without the threat of work action in extreme circumstances, maintaining workers’ rights will be much harder in the future.

As we approach 28 April, we should remember the sacrifices of those who have died just from going to their work. Among them are the miners, the power plant workers and those working in the North Sea whose lives ended without warning. Yesterday, there was a tragic incident in Blantyre, in my constituency, when a man went to work on a building site and did not return home. What happened in Blantyre shows that every day brings new challenges for safety and wellbeing, and terrible news for families and loved ones. However, with strong co-operation between the Government, industry and unions, we will remember the dead and continue to fight for the living.

12:51

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank Clare Haughey for bringing this important debate to the chamber. This is not the first time that I have spoken on the issue in Parliament; this important date for the working lives of the people of Scotland has become one of those that are annually recognised.

In 2012, I was honoured to lead a members' business debate to recognise the work of steelworkers and their contribution to our economy and industry and to acknowledge the fundraising efforts of the steelworkers memorial fund, which was started in Lanarkshire by many from civic society and the trade unions, who came together to fundraise for a memorial to steelworkers. Although we had two centuries in which steelworking was integral to this country's economic success, infrastructure and shipbuilding, there was no memorial to recognise steelworkers who had lost their lives in the industry. Thankfully, through those efforts, we now have a beautiful Andy Scott sculpture that depicts a steelworker with a stream of molten steel pouring from his hand and sparking on the ground.

I have the great privilege of being convener of the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness. I pay tribute to the many members of that group who work day in and day out to improve the safety of workers here and in the wider world. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health does exemplary work in training, accreditation and sharing best practice here and abroad. The Health and Safety Executive is a member that looks to protect our workers, and we also have the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and many others. I particularly thank families against corporate killers, which is a group that reminds us every day of the dangers that still exist for workers in many industries.

It is important that, as the country moves forward, we are not content to export risk and danger elsewhere for economic benefit here. We have a duty of care to ensure that, in countries around the globe in which legislation and regulation are not what they are here and in Europe, workers share in the safety, knowledge and best practice that we have grown to know in this country.

I pay tribute to the Scottish Trades Union Congress and Kathy Jenkins of Scottish Hazards—both are members of the CPG—for tirelessly fighting for workers not just in Scotland but around the globe. In particular, I mention that they continue to raise the issue of Union Carbide and the Bhopal disaster, for which many people are still seeking justice. It is significant that something that happened in 1984 resulted in criminal convictions only in 2010. That is not good enough.

Next week, I will stand with trade union colleagues from across Lanarkshire at the memorial service at Summerlee heritage park. I am grateful that Clare Haughey has reminded us that we all have to remember the dead but fight for the living.

12:55

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Clare Haughey on securing the debate.

No one leaves the house for work expecting not to return to their family and loved ones at the end of the day. At the outset of the debate, I offer my condolences to the many families, friends and colleagues who have lost loved ones as a result of an incident at work.

In my previous employment, I was responsible for a building that had up to 400 people inside. As in all workplaces, security was paramount—I meant to say that safety was paramount, although security is also important. I would never have wanted to be put in a situation where an incident—God forbid a fatal one—could have been avoided if only more checks had been carried out or some money had been spent on protecting the workplace inside. The safety and protection of the workforce and workplace were always a priority of mine and they should—I hope—be a priority for all people who are in management positions.

Before today's debate, I reflected on a number of workplace incidents that I remember—incidents that are etched in the memories of many people who were directly or indirectly affected. I spent my earlier years in Glasgow, and one such event was the Cheapside Street fire disaster—Britain's worst peacetime fire services disaster. That blaze at a whisky warehouse killed 19 firefighters. Those people put their lives at risk in the line of duty and, sadly, they paid the ultimate price. I clearly remember that the Glasgow sky that night was lit up by the glow of the fire.

We then moved to Fife, and another incident that I remember well took place while we were living there, which was the Michael pit disaster. Clare Haughey mentioned mining disasters, and this one took place at the Michael colliery in East Wemyss. The disaster claimed the lives of nine men. Three of the bodies were never recovered and remain entombed underground to this day.

Amid the horror of that event, there are stories of the heroic efforts of people who put themselves in harm's way that night to save the lives of the miners who were working on that shift. Some of those people, too, did not return. We should not forget such stories and I commend the members of our fantastic emergency services for their bravery.

The Michael pit incident is only one example of a workplace incident that occurred in what was a very dangerous industry. Today we remember all those who lost their lives working down the pits across the country.

I then moved to live and work in Aberdeen, and an incident took place that has already been mentioned. The Piper Alpha disaster happened on 6 July 1988 off the coast of Aberdeen. I do not know whether any members were in Aberdeen at that time, but the incident certainly had a very strange effect on the city the day after, and the consequences have gone on long after.

Lord Cullen's report on the disaster made it clear that the operator had used inadequate maintenance and safety procedures, and the report made more than 100 recommendations about how safety should be improved in the North Sea. Lord Cullen introduced the concept of the safety case, which has become standard procedure in the industry.

I am sure that members who are aware of that disaster do not need to be reminded that 167 oil workers lost their lives. That number might have been lower if better procedures had been followed.

The three examples that I have touched on all resulted in people dying while carrying out their jobs. We remember each and every person who lost their life as a result of an incident at work, whether they are members of our emergency services, miners underground or workers in the oil and gas industry. As I said at the start of my speech, safety is paramount, and we should never rest on our laurels when it comes to improving safety measures.

I see that time is passing, so I will conclude. I have always had an interest in safety and safety systems. I am relatively new to the Parliament, but I look forward to participating at some point in a practice emergency evacuation of the Parliament, which I hope will ensure that we all know what to do if something goes wrong here.

13:00

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): My colleague Alex Rowley has asked me to apologise for his absence from today's debate; he had intended to speak, but he has another engagement. In addition, I will have to leave after making my contribution as I have to chair a Public and Commercial Services Union group meeting.

I thank Clare Haughey for bringing to the chamber what is now an annual debate on international workers memorial day. The debate is not about nostalgia but about the here and now, because every 15 seconds a worker somewhere in the world dies from a work-related accident or disease. That means that, in the course of my speech alone, 16 workers will have died, and 180 will have died during the debate. It is a sobering and tragic reality that more people are killed at work than are killed in war and conflict. That is why we recognise international workers memorial

day each and every year and why we will continue to do so in memory of those who have lost their lives.

There have been massive improvements in health and safety in the UK over the past century as a result of campaigning by the labour and trade union movement. That campaigning reaches way beyond this country's borders. We have always worked internationally across borders, as our movement is based on the principles of solidarity with working people around the world.

Next week, I will attend the annual service at Bathgate, which has been arranged by my friend Jimmy Swan, an ex-convener at British Leyland who was instrumental in bringing international workers memorial day to Scotland. Alex Rowley will be in Kirkcaldy and Richard Leonard will be at Summerlee, and Labour members and friends will attend services throughout the country.

It is right that we mourn the dead, but I will focus on the campaign to protect the living. In the past few months, workers have been killed in construction projects across Scotland. A 37-year-old man was killed on a wind farm in Dumfries. A forestry worker was killed in Selkirk. Another wind farm worker was killed in South Ayrshire, and one was killed in East Renfrewshire. A 57-year-old man was killed on the Forth crossing, and a 58-year-old man was killed on the new Don crossing. Only yesterday, as Clare Haughey mentioned, a worker was killed on a construction site in High Blantyre.

On the Aberdeen bypass, a worker is injured every week. More than 115 workers have been injured since the project began, and I and Unite the union have had reports of the exploitation of migrant labour by agencies that are operating under that contract. Trade unions have been stopped from having full access to the new Dumfries hospital site. On the Forth crossing, the union convener was not replaced.

Those projects are commissioned and run by the Scottish Government. Where is the adherence to fair work principles there? Where is the adherence to such principles when we seek to develop relations with foreign Governments such as that in Qatar at the same time as a massacre of construction workers is going on in world cup projects? Literally thousands of poor migrant workers have died, and yet we are engaging with that country and not raising that issue.

Where are the fair work principles in continuing to award contracts to companies that blacklisted workers—in particular the crucial health and safety representatives who kept sites safe and protected workers from injury and death? Those reps have all been blacklisted and taken off jobs by big construction companies in the name of profit, and

yet we continue to award those companies contracts. Where are the fair work principles there?

We are entering a general election period in which I will be proud to argue for a £10 an hour minimum wage, which should improve the lives of 500,000 workers, and for public contracts to be covered by collective bargaining, because collective agreements and an organised workforce make for a safer, more motivated and more productive workforce. I will also be proud to argue for the repeal of the odious Trade Union Act 2016. I urge all workers, not only this week and next but at any time, to join a trade union. Trade unions are vital to protect workers' rights and to protect against unfair employment practices, low pay and exploitation.

It is a privilege to speak in the debate and to highlight the importance of international workers memorial day. Yes, let us mourn the dead, but let us all resolve to fight for the living.

13:05

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Next Friday, we will mark international workers memorial day, on which we remember those who were killed at work—many of them because their bosses did not take safety seriously and put maximising their profits ahead of the lives of their workers. As Clare Haughey mentioned in her opening speech, the rallying call for the memorial day is

“Remember the dead, fight for the living”.

Employment rights in this country were hard won by centuries of workers' struggles: the radical war, the chartist movement, red Clydeside, the general strike and the post-war labour movement. In previous debates, I have mentioned the need to teach that history—our history—in our schools.

On international workers memorial day in my region, we will be in Bishopbriggs to remember the 22 miners who died in the Cadder pit disaster. That happened in 1913, but as has already been mentioned in the debate, the fight is very far from over. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ranks the UK as bottom of the barrel in Europe when it comes to workers' rights. The European Committee of Social Rights has chastised the UK for non-compliance with whole swathes of labour rights, again ranking the UK as among the worst in Europe. Yet the priority of the Tory Government at Westminster is to pass a piece of anti-trade union legislation that is so draconian that someone who is now a Cabinet minister in the Westminster Government described it as fascist in nature and more akin to something in Franco's Spain than in 21st century UK.

I therefore say to Mr Bowman, given that we are talking about the priorities for safety in the workplace: who improves safety and fights for the safety of workers? Trade unions do. However, the Conservative Party is doing all that it can to shut down trade unions and prevent them from operating, which will cost lives.

Over 7 million people in the UK are in precarious employment, and the figure has gone up by over 2 million in a decade. Those people are self-employed, in temporary work or on zero-hours contracts. However, many of those who are classed as self-employed are, in reality, employees who are being exploited by a new wave of terrible employers, particularly when it comes to new app and tech-based firms. One courier firm—Deliveroo—has even issued a vocabulary guide to its staff, with a list of dos and don'ts along the lines of, “Do say ‘rider’, don't say ‘employee’, ‘worker’ or ‘staff’; do say ‘supplier agreement’, don't say ‘employment contract’”. When an employer has to remind its admin staff to police their own language so as not to accidentally give away the employer's dodgy employment practices, we know that they are exploiting people.

Pretending that employees are actually self-employed contractors means that those workers lose out and are put at risk. On average, they earn about half as much as permanent employees and they are more likely to live in poverty. They are not entitled to sick pay or holiday leave. If a courier who spends all day cycling on busy streets gets into an accident and has to miss work, they are on their own. Employees of Deliveroo have launched legal challenges over their status. That comes on top of successful strike action, supported by the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, that opposed attempts to worsen and further degrade pay rates.

Other legal challenges against firms such as Uber have been successful in ensuring that employees have proper legal status. However, workers should not have to take expensive and risky legal action to get their basic rights while bosses are getting richer and continuing their exploitation. Those rights should be protected in law, but even if a worker is finally afforded the correct legal status, they might still be confronted with a temporary or zero-hours contract and they can still face having no guarantee of regular hours, a stable income or protection against being fired on the whim of management. Those rights, too, should be protected in law.

In recent months, workers have been confronted with yet more innovative forms of exploitation. Mooboo Bubble Tea in Glasgow asked potential workers to complete 40 hours of unpaid work—a so-called internship—before getting a job. Subway used the UK Government's own website to

advertise for an “apprentice sandwich artist” to be paid at £3.40 an hour. That is exactly the kind of employment practice that generations of workers have fought against. Their struggles have been undone by a UK Government.

Now we have a new generation of workers fighting against a new generation of exploitation. For example, the young workers who are powering the better than zero campaign have successfully targeted businesses such as Subway, Mooboo and the G1 Group, which are ripping off their workers.

There is still a long way to go. We remember the dead, but the fight for the living must go on.

13:10

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important debate and, as others have done, I thank Clare Haughey for bringing it to the chamber.

International workers memorial day, which is an international day of remembrance and action for workers who have been killed at work, is an opportunity for reflection and commitment to change. Although, as has been said, the numbers are reducing year on year, last year, in Scotland, 20 people lost their lives at their place of work. International workers memorial day commemorates those who have lost their lives at work and also recognises the loss sustained by all who, in turn, have been touched by those deaths.

Regardless of whether someone works in an office or in heavy industry, there should be no question about whether they will be able to finish their work day alive. Everyone has a right to return home safe and healthy to their loved ones at the end of the day. Workers memorial day is an important reminder to us all that that does not always happen.

My constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston is proud of its rich industrial heritage, with strong traditions in the coal, iron and steel industries. Working in such heavy industries was frequently dangerous, with little safeguarding being in place to protect those workers, and many people in my constituency have direct experience of workplace loss, the effects of which can be felt by future generations.

Like most people who hail from the area, I come from a family with a strong and proud industrial working past. My maternal grandfather, for example, worked from the age of 14 in the various steelworks across the constituency, including those in Gartcosh and Gartsherrie, and in the Calder before it finally closed in the 1980s. My family recall—I was too young—that he sustained

a workplace injury at one point, leading to him being off work, and he would have known others who had the same experience.

Clare Haughey mentioned what is probably the most prominent example of such devastating loss in my area, which concerns the loss of 47 lives due to a fire in a local coal mine. On 18 September 1959, 47 men lost their lives, 41 women became widows and 76 children lost their fathers. On the morning of that day, the early shift at the Auchengeich mine in Moodiesburn—48 men in total—clocked in to work as normal. As normal, they all boarded a series of trains or bogies that were to convey them to the coalface hundreds of feet underground, all of them unaware of the deadly sequence of events that was in motion 1,400 feet below the surface.

A canvas transmission belt on an unattended electrically powered fan had jumped off its pulley and become jammed. The friction that was caused ignited the belt, which in turn ignited oil deposits around the fan. The flames then ignited nearby timbers. A decision to prevent the miners from entering the mine until further investigations could be completed was not adequately conveyed. With the 48 men underground, the fire then filled with carbon monoxide the main roadway on which the miners were travelling—their only escape route.

All but one of those men died, the sole survivor having very little memory of how he managed to make his way out of the pit. As I said, 47 men were lost, 41 women were made widows and 76 children were made fatherless—that is worth repeating—and all due to something that was preventable. Every year, a memorial service is held in Moodiesburn to commemorate the workers and remind us to remain vigilant, and 28 April is a day of remembrance for all who have lost their lives, sustained injury or become ill simply by doing their job.

Fatal injuries at work are becoming rarer, but workers risk their lives daily. In many respects, the risks may now be in different types of work. Just this week I learned that, in the Monklands area alone, a police officer is assaulted every three days. These people who pull on their uniforms to keep us all safe live with an increased level of risk just through the nature of their employment.

Next week, I will attend and speak at a workers memorial day event arranged by the North Lanarkshire trade union council, which is also held annually. The venue, appropriately, is the Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, where the two signs at the front read, first, “The past we inherit, the future we build” and secondly, on the right-hand side, “In memory of all those who lost their lives at work”.

I am delighted to join with colleagues across parties, including Richard Leonard, and I should also mention the work that Elaine Smith has done over the years. She came and spoke to me about her not being able to stay for my speech in the debate, and I appreciate that.

We must look forward to the recognition of workers' rights in the growing gig economy, as others have mentioned, and the potential effects on workers' safety. Advocates of the gig economy claim that people benefit from the flexible working arrangements, but it seems to me that that flexibility is of more benefit to employers, who pay only when work is available and do not incur staff costs when there is no demand for their work. Because workers in the gig economy are classed as independent contractors, they do not receive the national minimum wage, sick pay, holiday pay or protection against unfair dismissal. That situation has to change.

I feel privileged to stand here in this Parliament and talk about these issues. Indeed, we can do that only because of the sacrifices that the generations before us made in this industrialised country that has moulded us all.

13:15

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Clare Haughey on securing the debate on international workers memorial day. I feel very privileged to take part in it, so I thank her for the opportunity.

It is vital that we remember those who have tragically lost their lives while going about their day-to-day business at work. Down the years, trade unions have made a very important contribution: in fact, highlighting the need for robust health and safety standards in the workplace has never been so important.

With regard to its own health and safety record, the UK has been a pioneer in putting in place many regulations that have had a massive impact. However, more requires to be done—there is always room for improvement. I regret to say that far too many people have been seriously injured or become a fatality due to others' negligence or neglect. Businesses and organisations have a social responsibility and obligation to respect their employees' rights—in particular, in relation to their safety at work. Sometimes, however, merely complying with the relevant legislation is not enough, so we must do all that we can to protect the workforce. Trade unionism has a job to do in that regard, and we have to congratulate and commend trade unions for doing the job down the years. Without the trade union movement, many individuals and organisations would not have the

protections that they have today, and I want to acknowledge that in the debate.

Employers and employees both have rights and responsibilities when it comes to safety, and through the provision of training, through awareness raising and through campaigning, organisations such as Scottish Hazards have made a real contribution to ensuring that employees are safe in the workplace. Those organisations, too, must be congratulated and commended. In addition, the sharing of best practice between firms and groups is vital in preventing incidences of accident, injury and illness. A lot of sharing has happened over the years in various sectors, with some sectors leading the way in the protection of individuals and organisations.

I am proud that the Conservative Party is committed to protecting and, indeed, to enhancing the rights of some workers across the United Kingdom. Theresa May has made it quite clear that all rights that are currently enshrined in European law will be transferred into British law through the great repeal bill, which is moving forward and will put those rights on the statute book.

This year's international workers memorial day theme is good health and safety for all workers, whoever they are. It is very important that we consider every part of this, every organisation, every role and every type of job. With changes to working practices, businesses and, indeed, our economy, it is only right and proper that we re-examine existing worker protections to see whether they go far enough. The Government has hired Matthew Taylor to look into how rights can be extended in the so-called gig economy. I welcome that move, and I look forward to seeing what comes out of the review as it progresses.

It is important to ensure that all workers, no matter what their job is, have the right to work in a safe environment. I am pleased that there is good cross-party support across the chamber for the motion. After all, we should all remember the dead and fight for the living every day of our lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Hepburn to close for the Government. Minister—you have seven minutes or thereabouts.

13:20

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): I join others in congratulating Clare Haughey on securing the debate and thank other members for their speeches.

As has been mentioned, international workers memorial day is a day for reflection on the lives that have been lost due to incidents at work, and

through occupational disease and ill health. Scotland's health and safety record is among the best in Europe. I thought that the point that was made by Neil Findlay was salient because, of course, this is an international day and, globally, a life is lost in a workplace accident every 15 seconds. Of course, in Scotland, we have a better record, but we are not immune to the problem. Clare Haughey mentioned the tragic incident that happened in High Blantyre yesterday, which will rightly be the subject of investigation. I am sure that, at this time, all members want to convey their condolences to the family and friends of the man who was tragically killed in yesterday's incident.

Reflecting on times past, we can see that we have travelled far from where we once were in terms of health and safety in the workplace. Alexander Stewart was right to make that point. A variety of acts were put in place in the 19th century that led to some modest improvements in health and safety standards at that time. However, despite those improvements, tens of thousands of people were killed and injured at work annually well into the 20th century. We have heard today of some examples of those incidents. Bill Bowman spoke about the Cheapside Street accident in Anderston, where 19 people died. Fulton MacGregor spoke movingly about the terrible incident in 1959 at Auchengeich, in which 47 men were killed, including miners from Condorrat in my constituency. We have a memorial there to commemorate the incident, just as there is a memorial in Moodiesburn.

Those incidents and others led to the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. For the first time, employers and employees were consulted, and codes of practice and guidance became readily available. Between 1974 and 2007, the number of fatal injuries to employees in the UK fell by 73 per cent, and the number of non-fatal injuries fell by 70 per cent. We would do well to remind ourselves, as has been mentioned by most of those who have spoken today, that those rights were hard fought for and hard won by our trade unions.

Everyone has mentioned that this is a day for reflection on times past, but it is also a time for taking a look at where we are today and where we are going. In that regard, I have to say to Alexander Stewart that what he said about workers' rights being "enshrined" by Theresa May is somewhat inconsistent with the pernicious Trade Union Act 2016 that is being implemented by her UK Government. I mention that because that legislation is of specific concern in relation to the matter that we are discussing.

We cannot afford any roll-back on the health and safety agenda, but legislation that seeks to curb the rights of labour to organise itself leads to concern that such a roll-back might occur. We

need to remind ourselves of that because, despite the improvements in health and safety standards and the legislation that were put in place in 1974, we still see incidents of people losing their lives at work. In 1988, we saw the Piper Alpha disaster in the North Sea; in 2004, we saw the Stockline plastics factory explosion in Maryhill, not far from where I grew up; and in 2015-16, according to the Health and Safety Executive, there were 16 workplace-related deaths in Scotland. We have seen many improvements but, of course, too many tragedies still take place, so legislation that seeks to curb the rights of trade unions could lead to more concern about further roll-back on the health and safety agenda.

This Administration seeks to advance our fair work agenda: the independent fair work convention is at the forefront of that agenda. Collaborative working is central to the convention's promotion of fair work and to ensuring that all employers understand the benefits of an effective voice. Health and safety is firmly part of the fair work agenda. We know that accident rates are lower in workplaces in which employees feel that they are genuinely involved and have a say in health and safety matters than they are in workplaces where employees feel less involved. That is why we continue to fund the fair work convention and why our labour market strategy has set out an ambition to ensure that our workforce is better involved in the workplace.

While we reflect, we should also consider future challenges. The Government has significant concerns about the reduction in the Health and Safety Executive's budget of some 35 per cent since 2010, which has resulted in an end to proactive unannounced inspections of premises.

We would also do well to reflect on the points that Clare Haughey, Ross Greer and Fulton MacGregor made about the increase in self-employment and the gig economy. Undoubtedly, many individuals desire to be self-employed, but we know that many of the concerns of self-employed workers are to do with issues that have been raised in this debate. There are significant issues around self-employed workers not receiving proper employment status: they are not eligible for the national minimum wage, sick pay or holiday entitlement, and it is harder for such workers to organise themselves. We need, therefore, to ensure that workers' rights are protected, that they are not exploited, and that that type of employment does not displace secure jobs by creating part-time low-paid work that offers workers little or no statutory benefits or protections—in particular, health and safety protection in the workplace.

Today's debate is welcome. It allows us to record our collective commitment to ensuring that

we use international workers memorial day as a day to remember those who went before us and who died or were injured in the workplace, and to reassert our commitment to ensuring that we continue to have a good and ever-better health and safety record in the workplace now and in the future.

13:27

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Defence Basing Reforms

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S5M-05185, in the name of Keith Brown, on defence basing reforms and their impact on Scotland.

14:30

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): We in Scotland have a long and proud history with the military—a history that is embedded in our communities. Our military sites have been a visible presence in those communities, which are strong recruitment grounds for the armed forces. Some sites have been garrisons for centuries, and have been home to thousands of personnel and families over the years. The Scottish Government has called the debate because it believes that the connection between the military and communities in Scotland is in danger of being drastically weakened, with huge social and economic consequences. I argue that there are also potential consequences for recruitment to the armed forces.

On 7 November 2016, the Secretary of State for Defence announced an estate optimisation strategy and proposed a wide range of military base closures across the United Kingdom. On 9 November, I updated Parliament on implications for the defence estate here in Scotland. The strategy is the latest in a series of reviews in recent years that have been aimed at reducing the defence estate, and this round is the most brutal of all. If it is implemented, it will reduce the size of the defence estate in Scotland by almost 20 per cent. The reduction represents the most far-reaching defence cuts ever made in Scotland, but decisions were made without any consultation of the Scottish Government—so much for the respect agenda that was signed up to by both Governments—and despite repeated attempts to speak to Ministry of Defence ministers.

Scotland's historical defence footprint has been diminished through the shrinking of the military presence in many areas. That will have a detrimental impact across Scotland, and all of us in Parliament have a responsibility to the communities that we represent to make our collective voice heard on the issue.

I remind Parliament that the strategy's intention is that the armed forces in Scotland will be concentrated at what are called regional hubs at HM Naval Base Clyde, RAF Lossiemouth and Leuchars barracks. Of course, investment in those sites is very welcome. Along with local authorities,

we in the Scottish Government will work constructively with the MOD to ensure that personnel and families that move to Argyll and Bute, Moray and Fife receive a warm welcome and have a smooth transition. I have also given senior military personnel that assurance.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way. Will he be able to explain what further assistance he can give local authorities, including Moray Council, for the transition of a large number of personnel and their families, particularly in respect of house building, school capacity and such like? That concern has been raised in Moray. I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments, but would like a bit more information on how he will do that with the local authorities.

Keith Brown: I will concentrate on that during my speech, although it will, unfortunately, be much more about why our ability to do that has been diminished by the lack of consultation—not just of the Government, but of local authorities. However, that was a fair question that I will seek to address.

It remains to be seen what will be proposed for Leuchars barracks. There have been suggestions that a unit might move from Leuchars to England, but there has been no confirmation that there would be any consequent uplift in numbers at Leuchars itself. However, I am cautiously optimistic that there is a positive future for Leuchars barracks locally.

It is also positive that Kinloss barracks in Moray has emerged relatively unscathed from the cuts. I understand that that was a borderline decision and that Kinloss's disposal was reversed at the last minute. I pay tribute to the Moray economic partnership and to local elected representatives for their work in arguing the case for Kinloss.

As recently as yesterday—to come back to the point that was raised by Douglas Ross—I spoke with all the local authorities involved. Moray Council, in particular, is very concerned that the decision has left questions about Kinloss barracks's future sustainability, and about how decisions that have been taken will impact on the local area. Those are not my words—they are the words of the leader of Moray Council. He also said that, compared with other local authority areas that are being impacted by the cuts there is not the same demand for new housing there, or the same premium on it, so the situation at Kinloss is different. The council leader's major concern is the future viability and sustainability of the base. To come back again to Douglas Ross's point, we have to ensure that 39 Engineer Regiment is a firm part of the community in Moray, and that we expend every effort to avoid Kinloss falling under consideration in future reviews. That goes back to the point that I made about future sustainability.

On the more negative news in the announcement, eight sites are proposed for disposal. Seven are major sites—Fort George near Ardersier, MOD Caledonia in Rosyth, Glencorse barracks in Penicuik, Meadowforth barracks in Stirling, Craigiehall camp, and Redford cavalry and infantry barracks in Edinburgh. Most sites are intended for disposal by 2022, although there are longer lead-in times for the Army to vacate Fort George and Glencorse, which is to happen by 2032. However, withdrawal may begin well in advance in order to save money on maintenance or refurbishment costs for properties that the MOD intends to vacate. To an extent, blight starts almost as soon as such announcements are made.

The MOD also proposes disposal of the Royal Marines' Condor airfield in Arbroath. It is unclear how that will affect the base's capability or what possibilities there are for alternative use. As with Kinloss, we must bear it in mind that the review is unlikely to be the last. The chipping away at RM Condor is a worry if it weakens viability of the site in years to come.

Overall, the impact on families is grim. The cuts will see the near total removal of the Army from large parts of Scotland, and the end of the Royal Navy's centuries-old presence in Fife. The closures and unit moves are far removed from the stability and certainty that then defence secretary Philip Hammond promised personnel and families in the wake of the previous MOD basing review, which was not long ago.

More than half the Royal Regiment of Scotland will be on the move. Indeed, just before Christmas last year, we also learned that 1 SCOTS battalion, the Royal Scots Borderers, which is currently based in Northern Ireland, will have to move to Aldershot, which will be the battalion's third move in a matter of years; the children of the families involved will be moving to their third education system in a matter of years.

Constant disruption makes it difficult for families to settle and put down roots. It impedes spousal employment, which members across Parliament are keen to see improving and increasing, and it causes disruption to children's education. As we all know, school moves can have a detrimental impact on educational attainment. Of course, families have no choice in the matter. As I mentioned, in the case of 1 SCOTS, there will be children who will have to go through three different schooling systems and three different curricula. That is unfair. In my view, it speaks volumes that that was not a factor in the decision making of the MOD—it did not occur to it. From a Scottish perspective, it is bitterly disappointing that that Scotland-recruited battalion has not been returned to Scotland, which might—among other

advantages—have helped families by locating them near their extended families, which could assist with childcare.

In the light of the community impact, I have established a working group with the local authorities that are most directly affected. So far, we have met twice, including the meeting yesterday that I mentioned, to assess the impact and try to agree the way forward.

I will summarise some of the data that have been shared so far on the closures. Fort George has been a garrison for almost 250 years and is home to 600 personnel from 3 SCOTS battalion, the Black Watch. The closure will devastate the local community. Highlands and Islands Enterprise estimates that more than 700 jobs could be affected directly and indirectly, and Highland Council estimates a loss of approximately £20 million from the local economy.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I understand the point that the cabinet secretary makes about the economy, but will he also take into account the retention problems that the Black Watch is having because it is based in Fort George, because soldiers do not necessarily want to be based there? That is causing particular problems for the Black Watch.

Keith Brown: As Edward Mountain knows, there are, across the armed forces, recruitment issues for which there are a number of reasons. I am not saying that the reason that he has given in relation to the Black Watch does not apply. However, the same point was mentioned to me as recently as yesterday by somebody who is involved in these matters: I will leave it at that. I made the point that, if we are going to say—as Edward Mountain has just said—that Fort George is too far away from other defence establishments and too remote, we need to ask what that says about our United Kingdom armed forces. If parts of the UK are deemed to be too far away, too remote and too unattractive for people, that diminishes the armed forces and will in the future further exacerbate the current recruitment problems.

Highland Council estimates a loss of approximately £20 million from Fort George's local economy, as I said, and local school provision might be affected. I should say, to be explicit, that Highland Council opposes the closure.

Glencorse in Penicuik has had a garrison for almost 150 years. The barracks are home to 500 personnel from 2 SCOTS battalion, the Royal Highland Fusiliers. Glencorse is a modern fit-for-purpose barracks that has had considerable recent investment—from memory, there was investment of around £60 million as recently as 2006. Glencorse caters very well for the army and families, and the decision calls into question the

MOD's ability to meet its commitment to increase regular personnel numbers in Scotland to 12,500. To spend £60 million on providing the proper equipment and properly furnished rooms with the mod cons that people expect—and which I think most, if not all, members want—only to discard Glencorse a few years later, cannot be a good use of public moneys.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary knows, Glencorse is in my constituency. He is quite right to say that £60 million was spent on an upgrade just over 10 years ago. Is he aware that the army hailed Glencorse as “benchmark accommodation”?

Keith Brown: Yes—I have heard that and other remarks about the extent to which Glencorse has had the required investment, compared with some other defence establishments. Glencorse is popular accommodation. My view—it is just my view—is that the decision on Glencorse is one of the most marginal decisions in the review; I am hopeful that it can be reversed, because it just does not make sense.

Redford cavalry and infantry barracks have both been listed for early disposal by 2022. They are more than 100 years old and are well loved in the local community. The barracks are home to various reserve units: it is no simple matter for reservists, who might also have civilian jobs, to move to other sites. The sites are listed buildings, so their future use is uncertain; urgent discussion is needed with the MOD on practical options. The City of Edinburgh Council has passed a motion opposing the closures. There is also concern locally about the closures of other sites, notably MOD Caledonia—a proposal that spells a sad end to the Royal Navy's historical presence in Fife.

All the local authorities that I have spoken to are keen for meaningful dialogue at strategic level before assessment studies are carried out. At our first meeting, we agreed unanimously to ask the MOD to engage with the working group—which seems to me to be an entirely reasonable request. With the permission and agreement of the local authorities, I wrote to the defence secretary, asking for a minister to meet us. I should say that the local authorities represent all the parties in Parliament, perhaps with the exception of the Greens, so there was a cross-party decision to seek dialogue. However, the request was declined twice.

I eventually met MOD minister Mark Lancaster a fortnight ago to discuss the matter, but the request to meet local authorities and me was again declined. The MOD has, instead, chosen to speak to one or two planning departments in local authorities at officer level; it is reluctant to engage at senior level and refuses to meet the group

collectively. That piecemeal approach cuts elected representatives and some councils out of the loop and places council officers in an unenviable position. It also disrespects a very reasonable request, which was agreed unanimously by all local authorities and the Scottish Government, on how we wish to engage.

The closures will have a major impact on our communities and I have no confidence that the MOD is handling the matter with the seriousness that it deserves. I have heard from a number of sources that what has happened was at the Treasury's behest, and that if the MOD had not taken the decisions, the Treasury would have taken the decisions for the MOD.

The Scottish Government and local authorities are prepared to be reasonable and pragmatic. I have shared our view that in different areas the impact might be felt differently. If the matter is handled properly, we might be able to secure benefits such as accommodation for veterans—I raised that with Mark Lancaster—or other affordable housing options. However, with no movement from the MOD, the Scottish Government's position can only be to remain in opposition to the cuts in their entirety.

I call on members to unite, as a Parliament, and to send the message to the MOD that there must be meaningful dialogue with the Scottish Government, local authorities and local communities as a matter of urgency, before closures are taken forward. In some areas, we might be able to mitigate the worst effects of decisions and get a better deal for the local communities.

In saying that, I am not being wise after the event. I met Mark Lancaster before the process was initiated, and at that stage I said to him—no least in relation to Fort George, in which the Scottish Government has a direct interest—that we might get better decisions if we were able to work together. I have said before in Parliament that I am not aware—if there is concern about confidentiality—of one instance in the past 10 years when the Scottish Government has breached confidence into which it has been taken by the UK Government. We could have had the discussion at that stage.

We stand a chance of overturning bad decisions, if we fight them. We cannot turn our backs, simply accept what the MOD decides behind closed doors and let our communities down. We must press our case and make our voices heard. I call on Parliament to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses concern about the impact on Scotland of the military base closures announced by the

Ministry of Defence as part of its Estate Optimisation Strategy; supports local community opposition to closures, and calls on the UK Government to engage fully with the Scottish Government, local authorities and local communities as a matter of urgency.

14:45

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I speak in support of my amendment.

The UK defence estate is where our service personnel work, live and train. It is where our armaments are stored and where much of Britain's world-class defence research is carried out.

The British defence estate is split into three core parts: the built estate, which encompasses barracks, naval bases and airfields; the housing estate, which provides accommodation for British soldiers and their families; and the training estates, which are the facilities where our armed forces are trained and acquire the necessary skills to achieve success on the battlefield.

The better defence estate strategy, which the UK Government set out in November 2016, outlines a comprehensive and long-term plan for a more efficient built defence estate. The plan will ensure that Britain's military infrastructure is properly equipped to meet the defence challenges of the future. Following the 2015 strategic defence and security review, the 2016 paper "A Better Defence Estate" set out the need for the UK to reduce substantially the size of the country's built estate, with fewer and more specialised military centres.

The UK's built defence estate will reduce by 30 per cent by the year 2040. Of the sites that are in operation today, 91 have been earmarked for closure by that date, including eight in Scotland. The number of UK defence sites in Scotland will reduce from 24 to 16.

Despite previous comments to the contrary from Scottish National Party figures—such as the present, if soon to be displaced, member of Parliament for Moray, Angus Robertson—Kinloss barracks will not be closed and is to remain open. I am sorry that Mr Brown continued to give credence to the unfounded speculation about Kinloss. I have seen no evidence to support the argument that Kinloss was close to closure and, if Mr Brown has it, I hope that he will publish it.

Keith Brown: When I spoke about the future viability of the Kinloss base, I specifically mentioned the concerns of the local community and the council leader. It was not me who was saying those things; I passed on their remarks.

Jackson Carlaw: It was the cabinet secretary who said that there was a last-minute decision to save the base and that he understood that the decision was borderline. I understood that to be Mr

Brown's view, and it was certainly the view that Mr Robertson expressed.

The reprovision plan that the UK Government has set out makes it clear that none of the Army personnel at the bases that are to close will be relocated to sites that are not in Scotland, and the Secretary of State for Defence emphasised that in the House of Commons last November.

The reductions are not only necessary but unavoidable if we are to prepare an outdated defence estate for the challenges of the future and to ensure that we have the resources available to properly fund our armed forces in the years to come. It is no more supportable now than it was in 1815, after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, to argue that our defence estate must be maintained like some heritage tour to meet the threats from history. It must reflect our needs today and respond to the threats that are present today and those that will come.

In its current form, the defence estate is too large and needs to be rationalised to an appropriate size. It covers 424,000 hectares, which is the equivalent of 1.8 per cent of the UK landmass. Although the British armed forces are now 30 per cent smaller than they were at the turn of the century, our defence estate has reduced by only 9 per cent in the same period. It is right that the defence secretary has chosen to address those obvious discrepancies and rectify them with a timescale for shrinking the British defence estate.

The estate is also financially unsustainable. Every year, £2.5 billion is required to maintain it, and that money will be better spent by focusing on a smaller, more specialised network. Additionally, significant parts of our defence structure are too old—40 per cent of the assets have been in existence for more than 50 years.

Efficiencies that will be achieved by closing the 91 Army sites will save the Government £140 million over a 10-year period, which will rise to approximately £3 billion in total by 2040, and £4 billion of additional finance has been allocated for upgrading the retained defence estate over the next decade. That funding will be used to enhance our defence infrastructure in the locations where it is required by the armed forces.

To focus on Scotland, I have already said that eight of the 91 sites that are to close are based north of the border. Although we all understand the concerns that have been raised about the impact that the closures will have on communities in Scotland, the defence secretary has committed to consulting the relevant local authorities on the changes and, where appropriate, to consulting the Scottish Government. I heard what Mr Brown said, and his words were measured. I hope that they will

be heard and that the co-operation and consultation will take place. However, it does not help that the Scottish Government sets itself up front in opposition to everything that is proposed.

It is important to note that the reductions in the UK's built defence estate in Scotland are not as large as the reductions that will take place in the UK as a whole. In terms of acreage, the defence presence will decrease by an average of 30 per cent in the UK, compared with 19 per cent in Scotland. At the macro level, the UK defence estate in Scotland is to be consolidated into three main bases of operation: the royal naval base on the Clyde, RAF Lossiemouth and Leuchars Station. HM Naval Base on the River Clyde is set to become the home of the UK's entire submarine fleet. That key decision will result in the number of jobs on the Clyde rising to 8,200 by 2022, which will make that one of the largest employment hubs in Scotland.

Our armed service men and women at Faslane are to benefit from a £1.3 billion investment package that the Secretary of State for Defence announced at the end of February. That key investment has been allocated to allow improvements to be made to key operational functions at the Clyde, such as engineering support, accommodation and security on its waterfront. That will ensure that the naval base is ready to receive the new Dreadnought class of submarines, which are expected to arrive at the beginning of the 2030s.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Jackson Carlaw compared what has happened in Scotland with the rest of the United Kingdom. Does he accept that, since 2000, 10,170 jobs in the armed forces have been cut in Scotland, which is a reduction of 41 per cent, compared with a 28 per cent reduction across the UK? If we look at the long-term trend, Scotland is suffering a much greater reduction.

Jackson Carlaw: I do not accept that. The point that I make is that Scotland is an integral part of the UK defence forces, but it is imperative that we meet the requirements of the armed forces. There is no point in having some imaginary sense of what was appropriate in an entirely different era when the threat that we face today is entirely different. We must have a defence force that meets that potential threat.

The Trident nuclear deterrent, which I will touch on shortly, is also based on the Clyde. Nine maritime patrol aircraft are to be stationed at Lossiemouth in Moray. The P-8A Poseidon planes will result in more than 100 new jobs, on top of a £100 million investment to construct a support and training facility for the next aircraft to be built in Lossiemouth. Leuchars will be expanded

significantly to allow it to become the Army's main base of operations in Scotland.

Demonstrably, the UK Conservative Government is investing in Scotland's defence to ensure that Scotland remains at the heart of Britain's armed forces. None of that would be available, practicable, deliverable or even fantasiable in the nightmare of an independent Scotland.

I turn to the independent Trident nuclear deterrent, which has acted as Britain's ultimate insurance policy since it replaced the Polaris missiles in the 1980s. Predictably, the SNP has attempted to use the defence estate reforms as yet another opportunity to drive a wedge between Scotland and the rest of the UK and to argue against the vital importance of Trident to our defence capability.

During the defence estate debate in the House of Commons last year, the SNP defence spokesman at Westminster described Trident as

"an obsession which is swallowing up more and more of the defence budget."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 7 November 2016; Vol 616, c 1289.]

Such comments not only create a misleading image of the proportion of Government spending that is taken up by Trident but fail to recognise the proven importance of nuclear weapons in defending our country.

The financial outlay for the cost of the successor Trident submarines amounts to only 0.2 per cent of the total annual spend by the UK Government—that represents 20p out of every £100 of Government spending. Rather than being an overbearing burden on Government finances, the amount of money that is being spent to renew Trident provides further evidence in support of the decision of the House of Commons last summer.

In an increasingly uncertain international environment, with a revanchist Russia upgrading its nuclear capacity and with North Korea conducting nuclear tests on a seemingly endless basis, staging military parades and displaying military hardware with all the finesse of a despotic comic regime drawn by Hergé, it is critical that Britain retains the Trident nuclear weapons system, which works 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 52 weeks per year to protect Scotland with an effective deterrent.

The UK defence estate strategy will concentrate UK military bases in Scotland to provide a leaner, sharper and more efficient force. It will equip our armed forces for the threats that they may face in the future and provide them with the tools to respond to such threats in the most effective manner.

The extensive defence investment in Scotland by the UK Government—such as the additional resources for HM Naval Base on the River Clyde and for RAF Lossiemouth in Moray, along with the renewal of Trident—are profound examples of the military benefits that Scotland gains from being part of a wider United Kingdom and highlight the fact that in the realm of defence we are unarguably better served by remaining British. I paraphrase the First Minister in saying that Scottish ministers debate while UK ministers deliver, and the Scottish Government whinges while the UK Government protects the nation.

I move amendment S5M-05185.3, to leave out from "expresses" to end and insert:

"understands that the Ministry of Defence's Estate Optimisation Strategy has the sensible aims of updating the defence estate to be more capability focused and better suited to the needs of modern armed forces; believes that the UK Government should continue to engage fully with the Scottish Government, local authorities and local communities on the review; notes that the defence estate in Scotland will still remain considerable; acknowledges that the UK Government has made wider investment in defence in Scotland supporting thousands of jobs, and believes that an independent Scotland would have a very limited military, which would weaken the defence of the nation and damage its proud military traditions."

14:55

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

A little more than seven years ago, I brought to the chamber a members' business debate to discuss concerns about the possible closure of RAF Kinloss. The cross-party campaign was supported by all the party leaders at that time: Alex Salmond, Annabel Goldie, Tavish Scott and Iain Gray. I argued then, and I argue today, that armed forces personnel have a social covenant with our country, at times of peace and at times of war. During times of conflict, I always remember the lines from John Maxwell Edmonds that are repeated every remembrance Sunday across Scotland and beyond:

"When you go home, tell them of us and say
For their tomorrow, we gave our today."

The importance of the social covenant was best illustrated to me 25 years ago when the American naval base in Dunoon closed, with a loss of 1,500 American personnel. The local community rallied round and set up a dynamic economic committee that received European and Government funding support to diversify the economy and provide new jobs.

Like most members in the chamber, my interest in the debate is personal. My father did his national service with the Royal Air Force at Kinloss as a fresh-faced 18-year-old, nearly 70 years ago. During my last year of school in the Highlands, I thought seriously—as Jackson Carlaw did—about

joining the RAF, but instead I chose the less hazardous conflict zones that come with a career in politics.

However, during my time in Westminster, from 1997, I relished the opportunity to serve with the RAF for two terms as part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I welcome the setting-up of the Scottish scheme this week, and I hope that members on all sides of the chamber will volunteer to take part in it. During my involvement with the Westminster scheme, I had direct experience of RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth, as well as a memorable week in Basra, in Iraq, which I can speak about at some other time. I flew in a Tornado fast jet, a Nimrod maritime aircraft and a Sea King search-and-rescue helicopter. On my last day with the RAF, the Sea King that I was involved with had to attend an emergency in Glencoe. I vividly remember flying a few hundred feet above Loch Ness on the way to Glencoe and observing at first hand the bravery, expertise and professionalism of the pilots and the winch crew as they saved the life of a young Swiss mountaineer who had fallen and suffered severe facial injuries. My experience was a brief snapshot, but it gave me a tremendous admiration for the armed forces and for veterans.

Fort George army barracks, which is in my region and just minutes from my home, is scheduled—as we heard from the cabinet secretary—to be closed by the UK Government in 2032. As members may know, Fort George was designed by Major General William Skinner and opened in 1769, and it has remained a British army base ever since. As we heard from the cabinet secretary, it is home to the Black Watch, and it supports 700 jobs and contributes £16 million to the economy each year.

The original decision to close Fort George led to a storm of outrage in the local community. The high-profile campaign was spearheaded by the actor Hugh Grant, whose grandfather once served as the commanding officer there. Major General Alastair Dickinson, who is the director of army basing, conceded that there was a lot of emotion around the Black Watch leaving. In *The Times*, in November 2016, he said:

“The closure of a base like Fort George is incredibly sad.”

The base closure is a real blow to the defence footprint in Scotland and in the Highlands in particular. In my view, Ministry of Defence bases are excellent recruiting sergeants, and there must be a real risk that base closures will hit future recruitment. Close regional connections have always existed between Scottish sailors, soldiers and airmen and the places where they were trained and recruited. As *Times* journalist Magnus Linklater said:

“The fierce loyalty to their own localities was felt every bit as deeply by Scottish troops in Afghanistan and Iraq as it was at Ypres or The Somme. The loss of that close and enduring link will steadily erode the emotional attachment so important to military morale, as is bound to have an effect on recruitment.”

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

David Stewart: I will just finish my point first.

Labour will support the Scottish Government's motion at 5 o'clock. Our amendment recognises

“the crucial economic and social contribution of military bases in Scotland”

through both the direct spend by armed forces personnel and the multiplier effect on local businesses. One need look no further than Fort George and its effect on the economies of Ardersier and Inverness.

I am happy to give way to Stewart Stevenson.

Stewart Stevenson: Is Mr Stewart aware of the perverse effects of the Capita contract that the Tories have let for recruitment? To meet the targets in the contract, Capita has to divert people who come forward in Scotland wishing to join Scottish regiments to regiments that are based elsewhere in the UK, decisively damaging that very valuable connection between local communities and people who have historical and emotional connections to local regiments but are no longer being permitted to join them.

David Stewart: I endorse Mr Stevenson's excellent point. In fact, I read about that very point in Hansard earlier today.

Our amendment

“calls on the UK Government to halt all and any base closures until it has prepared and consulted on full economic assessment and employment diversification plans.”

When we debated the issue of RAF Kinloss seven years ago, I pointed out that Highlands and Islands Enterprise had commissioned an independent economic impact analysis that showed that the two RAF bases in Moray at the time supported more than 5,500 full-time jobs—16 per cent of all full-time employment in Moray—and that the economic impact of closure would involve the loss of more than £155 million a year. The report concluded by saying:

“It is clear that the economy and population of Moray is heavily dependent on the RAF, probably more so than any other region of the UK.”

There is much that we can learn from the closure of RAF Kinloss and from the situation in the US, where the Government takes responsibility for rebuilding and rebooting local areas when defence bases close. That is a

practical form of social covenant with the local community. We are calling for that kind of social covenant for Scotland. When military bases are scheduled to close, we must use all available economic levers to attract inward investment, stimulate local business initiatives and offer redundant military and civilian staff retraining and support. We would seek to draw down more European Union funding and consider relocating Scottish Government posts and agencies to affected areas.

The loss of any military base is a blow for the local area. In my region, losing Fort George after losing RAF Kinloss will be a body blow. I believe that we must honour the covenant with our armed forces, but there is also a social covenant with communities that are plunged into economic uncertainty and instability by the closure of bases that have become central to their existence. We must say no to the cavalier and unfeeling dismissal of those communities' concerns and ensure that everything possible is done either to prevent the closures by changing the minds of Government or to commit the necessary resources to mitigate the damaging impacts of closure. To paraphrase the late Canon Kenyon Wright, what if the UK Government said "Yes, Fort George should close, and we are the Government", but the Highlands said "No, and we are the people"?

I move amendment S5M-05185.1, to insert at end:

“; further notes the crucial economic and social contribution of military bases in Scotland, and calls on the UK Government to halt all and any base closures until it has prepared and consulted on full economic assessment and employment diversification plans.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We now move to the open session, with speeches of around seven minutes, please. We have some time in hand, so I can allow extra time for interventions.

15:03

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Since my election in 2011 as the MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands, the three Army bases in my constituency—the Dreghorn, Redford cavalry and Redford infantry barracks—have been under constant review. The Army has been part of the local community in Colinton for over 100 years, supporting local schools, businesses and the post office. Without Army families, the viability of a large range of facilities from Colinton to Oxbgangs will be called into question and there is concern that the area could become like a ghost town.

Back in 2011, all three barracks were earmarked for closure, following the announcement by the then defence secretary, Liam Fox, that a superbarracks was to be built at

Kirknewton airfield to house a mobile brigade. Those plans were scrapped in 2013 due to the estimated £400 million cost, public outcry and another round of Army cuts.

The regular Army basing plan, published on 5 March 2013, highlighted what was to become of the three barracks in my constituency under the Army 2020 project: Dreghorn, home to the Royal Scots Borderers since their formation in 2006, was to be retained, but the sting in the tail was that it was to be handed to 3 Rifles, a unit that recruits predominantly from Yorkshire and the north-east of England; and Redford cavalry barracks and Redford infantry barracks were to become home to the headquarters unit of the 51st Highland Brigade and HQ Scotland, including the 5th Battalion the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which was reduced to a single public duties company following another round of defence cuts.

The Army base at Redford was already home to a range of ancillary Army units including a military intelligence unit, the 105th Regiment Royal Artillery Volunteers, the City of Edinburgh University Officers Training Corps and the Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming.

A report in February 2016 by the defence infrastructure organisation confirmed the 2013 position, saying:

“It is expected that all buildings at Redford Barracks will be retained for military use but some areas of land may be released.”

The same report highlighted that Redford would indeed be the HQ of the 51st Highland Brigade and HQ Scotland, with the move completed by 2018.

Just nine months later, Michael Fallon announced that Redford cavalry barracks and Redford infantry barracks were to close as part of the better defence estate review. The closure list also included Craigiehall, Meadowforth barracks, Fort George and Glencorse. In his announcement in November 2016, Michael Fallon said:

“The plan will see sites and bases moved to locations that offer better opportunities for military families—increasing employment prospects for partners and spouses, helping them to settle into communities, buy their own homes and have their children benefit from more stable schooling.”

It is ironic that the reasons that were given for the base changes were the same reasons that were given to the Royal Scots Borderers when they moved into their base at Dreghorn 10 years earlier. They put down roots in the community and purchased homes, and wives and spouses started careers in the Edinburgh area, only to be told in 2014 that they were moving to the Palace barracks in Holywood, Northern Ireland. Just as they were starting to settle down in their new base

in Belfast, the 2015 strategic defence and security review led to the announcement that they would move again, to Aldershot, by 2019. Two moves in five years for 1 SCOTS does not help these Army families to put down roots.

However, at least 1 SCOTS have a new home. In a letter that I received from Mark Lancaster MP in November 2016, he highlighted that

“Work to identify potential future locations for all units at Redford Cavalry Barracks and Redford Infantry Barracks continues.”

But where are they going to go? The Glencorse base is earmarked for closure despite the fact that it was totally refurbished at a cost of £60 million 10 years ago and is home to 2 SCOTS the Royal Highland Fusiliers, who are also now waiting for a new base.

Keith Brown: Does the member agree with Jackson Carlaw’s characterisation that to defend the community against the closure of Glencorse barracks is tantamount to defending a heritage tour? Given what he said about the £60 million investment, does the member not think that that shows dripping contempt for the communities in Penicuik?

Gordon MacDonald: Absolutely. The barracks has been a benchmark for Army accommodation.

Craigiehall, which has been an Army base since the second world war, previously served as HQ Scotland for 2nd Division, but it was announced in early 2016 that it was to be sold, although no date was given for the sale. One reason for that might be that the Royal Logistic Corps bomb disposal unit is based there. Although it is due to move to Dreghorn barracks, that is in a built-up area, which is not conducive to the ordnance that the unit requires to store for operational reasons. Also, Dreghorn is full. Currently, it cannot accommodate all of 3 Rifles, with one company still being based at Redford barracks until future development work gets under way.

Fort George, another historic Army base, which is home to 3 SCOTS the Black Watch, will also close, leaving them looking for a new home.

What about Meadowforth barracks in Stirling? The HQ units that are based there were due to relocate to Redford but will now also become homeless. The end result could be no Army HQ in Scotland.

According to the defence estate strategy, which was published on 12 January, there are 301 bases across the UK, representing 85 per cent of resource spending. Of those, 91 are to close, with eight major bases closing in Scotland.

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): That is incorrect. The Army will have a base, which most

probably will be at Leuchars in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon—I was talking about the headquarters.

Gordon MacDonald: The documents that I have read say that the new divisional headquarters for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be based at Aldershot. I did not include that in my speech, but I am happy to show the member where that comment can be found.

The UK Government is slashing around a fifth of the defence footprint in Scotland, removing the Army from large parts of the country, including from centuries-old garrisons such as Fort George, Glencorse and Redford. Such a move calls into question the defence priorities of a UK Government that can afford to spend £205 billion on weapons of mass destruction, and is willing to sell off conventional bases around the country to help to fund them, but with little regard for the impact on the Army or local communities. It is nothing more than a cash grab. Those are not my words, but what retired senior officer Colonel Clive Fairweather said back in 2011 when the bases in my constituency first came under threat. He accused the Ministry of Defence of being interested only in

“trying to make a quick buck”,

not in providing proper Army accommodation.

The MOD has changed its mind on a number of occasions about the Edinburgh garrison’s accommodation. It is still not too late for it to revert to the regular Army basing plan that was published back in 2013 and revoked only late last year.

15:12

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): First, I want to recognise Scotland’s historic and on-going contribution to the defence of our nation and the upholding of freedom and democracy across the world. I pay tribute to the men and women who serve across all branches of the military and recognise the sacrifices that they make in order to keep us all safe. It is important that we, as politicians, always remember that freedom does not come free.

The forthcoming closure of a number of Scottish defence bases and the impact on the communities in which they are situated sadden me, but our military leaders have made it clear that we need to modernise and to consolidate our defence estate to make it fit for the 21st century. I know from spending time in British military camps across the UK—Barry Buddon, Cameron barracks, Warcop, Alanbrooke and Sennybridge—that bases are often underutilised and that investment in infrastructure is currently spread too thinly. That is

why we need this process of modernisation and consolidation.

Let me be clear about what I would like. I want British defence infrastructure investment to continue here in Scotland; I want the tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs linked to the military in Scotland to be secured; I want to see the long-term viability of the defence estate in Scotland; and I want Scotland's role as a central cornerstone of the British Army in the defence of our nation to be maintained.

Despite the conjecture that we have heard from the SNP, we are seeing Scotland at the fulcrum of the British Army. In February, the defence secretary confirmed £1.7 billion of additional funding for military bases in Scotland. Faslane is, after the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow, the second biggest single-site employer in Scotland, and direct employment at the base is currently around 6,500, with thousands more dependent on the base for jobs through the supply chain. Furthermore, from 2020, all 11 Royal Navy submarines will be based on the Clyde at Faslane, which will raise the number of people who are directly employed at the base to 8,200. Those are jobs that are vital to communities and families in the region that I represent.

David Stewart: Does the member share my view that it is important that we also support British industry and does he, therefore, regret the decision to scrap the Nimrods, which were made in Britain, and the fact that we now buy maritime aircraft that are built in the United States of America?

Maurice Golden: We certainly need to support British industry. One of the ways in which we can do that is to encourage the defence sector in Scotland, which offers a lot of opportunities for highly paid, highly skilled jobs. If we are going to ensure that the defence sector continues to thrive, that will be key. We want more of those types of jobs to be linked to Scotland. They are good for the economy and they should be part of the UK industrial strategy.

An economic analysis of the Scottish defence sector by the Fraser of Allander institute revealed that almost 6,000 jobs and £162 million in wages are supported by BAE's yards on the Upper Clyde; that almost 4,000 jobs and £105 million in wages are supported by the Rosyth dockyard in Fife; and that, for every job on the Clyde, 1.18 jobs are supported across the wider Scottish economy. Further, Scots serving in the British Army have made it overwhelmingly clear that they have no desire to serve in anything other than the British Army.

We have heard a lot from the SNP today about its opposition to the closures, but what is its

position on the military in an independent Scotland?

Keith Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Maurice Golden: I have before me what the SNP has said previously on the matter, but I will happily take an intervention in order to circumvent some of that.

Keith Brown: The member said that the SNP has said that it opposes the closures. He started off by saying that he regretted the closures. Will he make it clear whether he opposes any of the closures or supports them all?

Maurice Golden: It was the wrong point of intervention; nevertheless, I can say that I am sad to see the closures but recognise that we have to have a modern, fit-for-purpose building infrastructure to support a modern, fit-for-purpose Army. That is required, however unfortunate any given situation might be.

In its 2014 white paper on independence, the SNP said that an independent Scotland would

"inherit a share of existing UK defence assets, giving us most of the equipment we need to establish Scotland's defence forces."

However, last month, the SNP's defence spokesman said that an independent Scotland would start from scratch, and we now hear that the SNP is currently working on

"a comprehensive, robust, costed and stress-tested defence policy for an independent Scotland".

If it is currently working on that, what does that mean for the defence proposals that were put forward in the white paper on independence? Can we assume that they were not comprehensive, not robust, not costed and not stress-tested?

No one in this chamber can be under any illusions about the one thing that, more than anything else, is putting defence jobs, defence investment and defence infrastructure spend in Scotland at serious risk. The one major impediment is the SNP because, like many individuals across a range of sectors and industries, all those who serve our nation, and the families that rely upon the military for their livelihood, are expendable to the SNP due to its gross obsession with independence.

Scotland can be proud of our contribution to the British Army and we want that relationship to continue. That is why I urge the chamber to support the amendment in the name of Jackson Carlaw.

15:19

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I have a personal interest in this debate, as Richard Lochhead and I are the constituency members who represent Moray in this place. For Moray, defence is an important issue, both for employment and for its wider economic effect. For my own part, I have little in the way of personal connection with matters military. My great-great-grandfather was a driver in the Corps of Royal Artillery Drivers and was demobbed in 1819 because he had become deaf, and my great-great-great-grandfather left HMS Medway in August 1782, and that is about it as far as my family is concerned.

Christine Grahame: Thank goodness.

Jackson Carlaw: Surely not. There must be more.

Stewart Stevenson: That is, apart from the other six people that I am being encouraged to talk about.

Seriously, though, the proposed closure of the defence bases will have, and the previous closures of defence facilities such as the RAF presence at Kinloss have had, a huge, disruptive and negative impact on the communities and families that have been part of the bases and interacted with them. However, defence estates represent a much wider problem. In tumultuous times in the world, defence is needed and must be mobilised in the fight against today's threats. It is no good continuing to invest in defence facilities that represent a response to the nuclear stand-off of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. I am amazed to have heard Jackson Carlaw talking indirectly about the £205 billion for Trident as an almost nugatory amount of money, when I consider what other things might be done with such a sum.

Today, the threats that we face as a country and as the western part of the world are fewer from states and more from non-state actors such as ideologically and radically based groups that are not attached to particular countries but which want to break down our values of freedom and democracy through violence, fear and hateful rhetoric. Nuclear weapons have not deterred a single person in ISIS. They have not deterred North Korea, which Jackson Carlaw referred to. At the end of the day, we must look not only at the effect on the bases here but at the underlying military principles that are driving the proposals, as well as the dark hand of the UK Treasury.

We need effective defence—of course we do—but cutting bases simply to save money does not address the issue of defence in the modern world. We have got to make changes. Reference was made to the battle of Waterloo, in the aftermath of which the Army was cut to a third of its size in the

three or four years after the battle. That was disastrous because of some of the things that happened thereafter. It certainly left the UK much less able to respond to threats that emerged in the Indies and the colonies.

Jackson Carlaw: That is simply not true.

Stewart Stevenson: I will take an intervention if Mr Carlaw wishes.

Jackson Carlaw: I am prepared to accept that Mr Stevenson may have been at Waterloo, but to suggest that a reduction in the armed forces after Napoleon was defeated led to some immediate crisis for Britain's influence across the world is nonsense. It was 50 years before the threats to which Mr Stevenson is alluding emerged. Of course it was the right thing to do. Defence forces must meet the threat. Although he talks about ISIS today, he cannot know what the threats in the next 40 years are going to be.

Stewart Stevenson: I am glad that Mr Carlaw has read "The Art of War", which contains the wonderful adage that no plan survives first contact with the enemy. I agree with Jackson Carlaw that we do not know what the threat might be next week, next year or in five years' time. That is why we need flexibility and diversity in our defence provision, which is obviated by our committing huge proportions of our defence expenditure to a weapon that is incapable of being deployed—Trident.

In the modern world, the kind of threats to which we are subject require physical presence adjacent to local threats and a mobile force that can move to where international threats are.

In the north of Scotland, in the past five or six years, we have twice seen the Kuznetsov, the biggest military ship in the Russian navy, in the Moray Firth. It was moored so close off Banff that we could see people with the naked eye—I usually wear glasses, but I could see them without them—walking on the aircraft carrier deck. It took more than 24 hours for any UK military presence to arrive to see what the Kuznetsov was up to and to protect our interests.

It is that failure to respond to today's defence challenges that underpins the failures that we see in the basing review. If money is simply spent on Trident, money is not spent on what we need. The Tories in particular constantly complain about business, education and healthcare budgets, but those budgets are dwarfed by the amount of money that they want us to spend on Trident.

Furthermore, the money that is spent on people in our Army and on bases has a wider economic benefit in a way that sending vast amounts of money to the United States for the equipment that is associated with Trident does not—and, by the

way, we do not even receive the codes that enable us to independently decide to use it. That is hardly supportive of the economic interests of this country or the UK as a whole.

We in Scotland have particular maritime interests. We have substantial fishing interests out to 200 miles and we have substantial oil and gas interests. Despite having all the UK's submarines based in Scotland, they are not suitable or useful for responding to the maritime threats to our interests. Therefore, we must look at what happens in navy bases. Even the Irish have seven vessels specially built for that purpose based around their coastline. That country is smaller than Scotland. Those vessels, in addition to its two maritime surveillance aircraft, are perfectly illustrative of what even small countries can do with more limited resources.

Let me return to what the previous speaker, Maurice Golden, said—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): No—close quickly, please.

Stewart Stevenson: The member said that good defence is based on people. I agree. We need more personnel located in Scotland, contributing to our economy and giving stability to their families and friends.

15:27

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I declare this interest possibly for the last time in the chamber: I am a councillor.

I welcome this debate, because it touches on a number of important themes. First, the relationship between Governments—the need for respect and collaborative working at local government, Scottish and UK levels to serve the national interest while respecting the needs of service personnel and the communities in which they are embedded.

Secondly, the debate is about ensuring that both the negative impacts of closures on communities are mitigated and that positive regeneration opportunities are realised as Ministry of Defence assets are released and defence staff are redeployed to other areas.

I acknowledge that the process of consultation and dialogue with the Scottish Government has been derisory. It seems as though Westminster has been playing a game of cat and mouse to prevent closure campaigns from springing up. Of course, all that that has done is undermine trust with service personnel and communities and encourage rumour.

The promise of consultation, stability and certainty that was offered in the previous basing review three years ago has not been honoured. I

accept that changes and rationalisation are essential, but the Westminster Government had an opportunity to bring the Scottish ministers to the table with constructive proposals for repurposing sites. It would have been hard for the Scottish ministers to campaign against closing Fort George if they had been built into a partnership to transform the asset positively at an early stage, and there is little evidence that the Scottish Government has betrayed confidences with Westminster over defence plans in the past. Therefore, I do not understand Westminster's logic in how it is operating in consultation with the Scottish Government.

Of course, it is not the first time that we have seen such cat and mouse games being played by Tory defence ministers. The surprise national armed forces day in Stirling in 2014 turned into a pre-referendum pantomime competing with the long-planned Bannockburn live national event less than 2 miles away. It was a farce; it was chaos.

I turn to the impact of the closures, which makes respectful partnership working so important and vital. So far in the debate, we have heard almost exclusively about the negative impact of closures, and I certainly recognise the concerns that have been raised by members and their constituents. In the case of the Royal Navy at Rosyth, I can understand why the end of a 100-year relationship with the MOD will be daunting for communities. However, we must recognise that that base is a hugely underutilised facility that has the capacity to contribute so much more to the economy of central Scotland if we broaden our horizons. The building and maintenance of commercial ferries, the development of a freight port, the reintroduction of passenger ferries and the creation of facilities for use in North Sea decommissioning all have the potential to provide livelihoods at Rosyth for generations to come.

In many cases, freeing up land and assets that have served as military garrisons will meet the very real needs of communities today. The assets could be transferred to the Scottish ministers or councils under city deals, for example. There is precedent for that in England, where five major sites have been transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency for housing, which people desperately need. My colleague Andy Wightman has raised the possibility of Redford barracks in Edinburgh being repurposed for housing. There are pressures in that constituency; families need homes.

There is another exciting opportunity at Forthside in Stirling. The MOD has been in the process of moving out of Forthside for decades. The once-vibrant ancient port connected the city to the River Forth and the trading routes of Europe, but for generations citizens were barred from entry

to Forthside by the MOD, as the area fell into ruin and disrepair. The release of land and buildings there has enabled some regeneration to occur already, and the city deal for Stirling and Clackmannanshire, of which the cabinet secretary will be well aware, will bring focus to a range of exciting projects, including a dynamic hub for third sector organisations and a national centre for building conservation.

I believe that the missing piece in that regeneration is the Meadowforth barracks and the vehicle maintenance depot, which is a sprawling industrial site that is right in the heart of the city. It is a brownfield site that is in public ownership, is next to rail and bus stations and is zoned for housing in the local development plan. In recent years, the Scottish Government has been pushing councils to find extra land for housing, and that has played into the hands of developers, who land bank premium green-belt land for executive housing that communities do not want and most families cannot afford. In Meadowforth, we have a site that ticks all the boxes, meeting much of the need for high-quality, high-density mixed affordable housing, right in the heart of the city. It even has the potential to feed into local plans that are under way for a district heating network that is managed by a municipal energy company. I welcome the future for the site.

Although I hope that jobs can be retained in Scotland in some way, I will not miss the other use of the Meadowforth site as an overnight lorry park for Trident nuclear warhead convoys. A nuclear warhead convoy parked up behind a flimsy fence next to a multiplex cinema in a city centre is one of the most surreal sights in 21st century Scotland, and a disaster movie waiting to happen.

The defence basing review will cause communities pain, although there may be communities who emerge as winners, such as Leuchars. The Westminster and Scottish Governments must step up, together with councils, and realise the positive economic and social opportunities that come from turning barracks into homes and swords into ploughshares.

15:33

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): As we have heard, the closures announced in 2016 by the Secretary of State for Defence will reduce the defence estate in Scotland by around 20 per cent and will have a significant impact on many areas, from Fort George in Inverness to the Redford barracks in Edinburgh. Communities will feel the impact, both socially and economically.

That is true in my constituency. The Meadowforth barracks are currently occupied by the 51st Infantry brigade and headquarters of the

Army in Scotland. The joint supply chain services and the important defence support group at Forthside will see 172 military and four civilian jobs relocated or reassigned by 2022. Meadowforth barracks have been listed for disposal, but as far as I am aware no clarity exists yet on where the Army personnel will go. The supply chain services and defence support group activity will be moved to Leuchars.

The jobs at Forthside are highly skilled, and the members of the workforce contribute to the health of the local economy through the salaries that they earn. The defence support group, in particular, carries out highly skilled work—I have seen it in operation at first hand. It is involved in the repair and upgrade of light and heavy armoured vehicles and wheeled vehicles, including light and heavy cargo vehicles. It also works on artillery gunnery, protect and patrol vehicles and many other types of military equipment. It carries out that work in in-barracks operations and in mobile support teams. As members can imagine, that requires a significant investment in not only the workforce, but highly technical equipment—both mechanical and electronic. We should make no mistake: the loss of the highly skilled workforce will have an impact on the Stirling area.

There are also social and historical aspects of the decisions that have been made by the UK Government. There is a huge connection in Stirling between the military and the city, and there will be a great sadness about the closures, which will bring to an end that long, historical direct connection. Such things matter. In that respect, I just have to look to my father, who was a member of the Royal Household Cavalry. He wore his brigade of guards tie every day of his life and was incredibly proud of that tradition. Referring to “heritage tours”, as Jackson Carlaw did, does no favours to the people who served in those regiments in the past or to the fantastic facilities that exist at Forthside. It does no favours to Jackson Carlaw either. I am sure that my son, who served in the Royal Air Force, would agree with my comments.

Forthside barracks have been there for a long time. Forthside was an ordinance depot in 1899 and became the depot for the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders before they vacated in 1999. As Mark Ruskell said, the Robertson Trust is carrying out some commendable work on those old barracks by transforming them into a third sector hub. The barracks will provide accommodation for charitable organisations and social enterprises, which will allow organisations to share space, learning and creativity, and to maximise financial efficiency; it will also encourage joint working and innovation.

The Meadowforth barracks are home to the 51st Infantry brigade, which is responsible for all the units of the Army reserve that are based in Scotland and is an adaptable force brigade. The brigade provides logistical and administrative support, is engaged with employers, communities and society and maintains strong links with local government, the emergency services and the community in order to provide resilience in times of need. The brigade is the largest in the United Kingdom in terms of geographical area and has a remarkable history.

The brigade began during the first world war with the formation of the 17th northern division, which spent the entire war in the hell that was the western front. During the second world war, it was deployed to France as part of the British expeditionary force. It eventually became the 51st brigade and, as the remainder of the British expeditionary force, it fought a famous lone battle when others were forced to retreat towards Dunkirk. For some time, it was asked to hold a line that was four times longer than a division would normally be expected to hold.

In 2002, the 51st took on the responsibility for the whole of Scotland, instead of just the Highlands, with its headquarters at Meadowforth barracks.

Mark Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Bruce Crawford: I will do that in just a second.

In 2014, the brigade HQ commanded all the troops that were deployed to provide support for the Commonwealth games in Glasgow. There was a good reason for that.

Mark Ruskell: I respect the history and the tradition, but does the member recognise that constituents of his are living in expensive and cold private sector rented accommodation in the centre of Stirling? Those families need housing and places to go. Does the member want to take that housing allocation out of the local development plan? If so, where would he put the houses?

Bruce Crawford: Mr Ruskell had better listen to the rest of my speech before he goes into a rant. I accept that the 51st Infantry brigade will have to move as that decision has been made. I think that Mr Ruskell does not understand what the DSG does—I will come back to that.

Over the years, the central location of Stirling's barracks has ensured that armed forces have been able to reach other parts of Scotland quickly and effectively when needed, and that is where the MOD is making a strategic mistake with regard to locating the defence support group in particular. We could find no better location to base that activity than Stirling, which is right at the heart of Scotland. Leuchars simply cannot compete on

strategic location. The central location is also important for providing support for the annual Stirling military show. Thousands of people from throughout Scotland and further afield go to the show for a great day out and to say thank you to the armed forces. With the closure of the barracks, the long-term future of such events is unknown.

Maurice Corry: I have been a member of the 51st Infantry Scottish brigade, which was previously the Highland brigade, and I know Forthside very well. Defence support group contracts are currently being introduced, and some of them are in place. One of the reasons for the move to Leuchars is that there is an airhead there. It should be remembered that the brigade is an operational brigade as well as a reserve brigade, so it needs access and 24 hours' notice to move with its equipment. That is one of the reasons that underpinned the move to Leuchars. There was also pressure from Stirling Council for social housing, which Mr Ruskell quite rightly identified. I know about that full well. That was the proper application of the armed forces community covenant.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Crawford, you can have the extra time.

Bruce Crawford: I was coming specifically to the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal. I accept that there is a good proposal to transform Meadowforth barracks and Forthside into a site for housing, business space and technology centres, and I am already on record as having said that I support that. However, given that the MOD's plans for disposal will not be fully implemented until 2022, any city region deal will have to wait some time before the release from those sites of any potential economic benefit or housing site for Stirling. Given the sheer size of the site—I am sure that Maurice Corry knows about that; it is enormous—DSG activity does not take up that big a proportion of it. The footprint is more than adequate to allow the release of the benefits that are envisaged by the city region deal and still retain, in particular, the DSG and its fantastic skills. It is a mobile unit that can move to service units from wherever it is based, so it does not have to be in Leuchars to achieve that. Unlike others, I am not going to give up on trying to hold the DSG in Stirling city, because it is located in the right place and it brings amazing skills to our part of the world.

I refer to some of the language that has been used by my Tory colleagues, particularly Maurice Golden, who accused the Scottish National Party of making the armed forces "expendable". That was quite a disgraceful thing to say. Actions often talk louder than words. I remember very clearly that, during the Iraq war, soldiers on the front line were sent P45s by the United Kingdom

Government when they were fighting for their country. That is what is called “expendable”. Don’t you dare accuse us of that in the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members that they are not having conversations with each other and that they should always speak through the chair.

Bruce Crawford: I apologise.

15:42

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I hope that I can bring a particular perspective to the debate, as I had the great privilege of serving for 15 years in the Army before I became embroiled in Scottish politics. Indeed, after graduating from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, my very first posting was to the Scottish infantry training depot at Glencorse barracks. I spent two years there, training our infantry soldiers before they joined our seven infantry regiments—those were the days when we had seven infantry regiments in Scotland.

I gently say to Stewart Stevenson, who is away from the chamber at the moment—I am sure that he can read the *Official Report* of the meeting—that there is nothing new in the idea that Scottish recruits are being sent to join English infantry regiments, and vice versa. In my time, there were many English, Welsh, Commonwealth and other recruits to the Scottish infantry at Glencorse. Therefore, that is absolutely nothing new.

I was sorry to find out that the Conservative Government seems intent on locking the doors at the refurbished Glencorse barracks some time in the next 15 years. It is not just Glencorse that is affected: many communities throughout the country are set to see their close ties to our armed forces being severed, with the subsequent loss of the economic benefits associated with having a local base nearby.

For decades, Liberal Democrat MPs and MSPs have fought to keep bases such as those at Fort George and Leuchars open, and we have succeeded.

Unfortunately, our current contingent of SNP MPs at Westminster has seemingly failed to hold much influence over the UK Government in that regard. [*Interruption.*] Members may groan, but that seems obvious to me. I wonder what Scotland’s 50 or so SNP MPs can actually achieve down in Westminster, because the SNP does not seem to have achieved much in the Scottish Parliament. To some extent, that is a symptom of the confrontation between the SNP Government in Scotland and the UK Government.

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

Mike Rumbles: I will in a moment. I wish that both Governments could work more closely together without—[*Interruption.*] There we are. Okay, let us move on from that. I was trying to say that they could perhaps work together.

Maree Todd: Will the member perhaps take an intervention now?

Mike Rumbles: Just a minute. Let us not forget that, as part of the UK, Scotland benefits from levels of security and protection that the SNP could not hope to replicate in an independent Scotland. That is a fact.

Let me be clear: I support the strengthening of the so-called regional hubs—Leuchars, Lossiemouth and HM Naval Base Clyde. They are real assets, and it makes good sense to have such a concentration on three major centres. It makes good sense in military terms; it makes good logistical sense; and it makes particularly good sense for our service families, who will face less of the continual disruption to family life that service in our armed forces entails. For example, in my own experience, in nine years of married life in the Army, my wife and I lived in eight different sets of married quarters, which was not unusual. The turbulence for personnel who serve in the Army is great. Anything that can help to stabilise family communities has to be a good thing.

I know that my colleague Willie Rennie has welcomed the prospect of 3 SCOTS the Black Watch coming home to its traditional recruiting grounds in Fife.

We need the scale of investment that is planned for those bases if we are to ensure that the defence capabilities that they provide can compete with modern developing threats. Just as the dangers that we faced in the era of the cold war have moved on, we must ensure that our capabilities move on with them. It is therefore sensible to scale back older capabilities that are not well adapted to the 21st century threats that we face. However, changes need to be made with great care and, in this instance, serious questions remain about whether the investment in those three bases necessitates the closures that are planned elsewhere in Scotland. Is it sensible to completely close defence establishments such as those at Glencorse and Fort George, to name just two? What thought has been given to using those barracks for the reserve forces? What thought has been given to other military uses that could be made of those bases?

In addition, the changes to our military estate in Scotland should be the subject of a proper impact assessment, and any community that ultimately loses out—as communities will—must see significant transitional support and investment. I

hope that the UK Government and the Scottish Government can work together to achieve that.

At points, this afternoon's debate has been in danger of becoming a debate on military strategy. The independent nuclear deterrent was raised, and we even had an intervention on the battle of Waterloo and the remnants of the Army, which was scaled down at that point. I thought that that was rather bizarre, given the subject of the debate. We also had Stewart Stevenson's traditional—if I can put it that way—reference to his family tree, going right back to the 19th century.

Although there have been interesting diversions from the subject of the debate, I will conclude by focusing on what the debate is all about: the UK Government's estate strategy. The strategy will not be implemented overnight; the changes at Fort George and Glencorse are scheduled to happen in 15 years' time, which is a long time away. That is why it is essential that the next UK Government—the one that will hold office after 8 June—takes time to get the reforms right and ensures that they are driven not by short-term thinking but by how best to maintain our long-term defence capabilities throughout the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We still have a little time in hand for interventions.

15:49

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I start by giving a loud thank you to Mike Rumbles for his cross-party endorsement of my colleague Angus Robertson MP, the Highland MP who has managed to secure the future of the defence base in his constituency of Moray.

Douglas Ross: Will Maree Todd give way?

Maree Todd: No, thank you.

I thank Mike Rumbles very much for that. I am sure that his support will be welcome, although unnecessary, as Mr Robertson's seat is very secure.

The brutal cuts to the defence footprint in Scotland, including the closure of Fort George, are of particular concern to my constituents in the Highlands and Islands.

Douglas Ross: Will the member give way?

Maree Todd: The uncertainty for folks in Moray as the threat of closure hung over Kinloss just a couple of years after promises were made to the communities was tough, but at least it will be saved.

Douglas Ross: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, it is clear that Maree Todd is not going to give way.

Maree Todd: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

At least Kinloss will be saved for the time being. The impact on the Highlands of closing Fort George will be really tough to absorb and no one is relishing the prospect of a long slow decline. Fort George might have been built to quash rebellious Highlanders, but it is now part of the fabric of our communities in Ardersier, Nairn, Inverness and the wider Highlands. Many Highlands and Islands families, mine included, have personal connections with it and, during the great wars of last century, almost every family in the Highlands will have had a relative pass through the base en route to the wars in Europe.

For the communities affected, the announcement has been devastating. For decades, we have witnessed the decline of the military presence in the Highlands and in Scotland. Closing Fort George will mean that the military no longer has a meaningful presence in the Highland Council area, which is an area larger than Wales. It is impossible to see how the MOD can maintain a footprint across the whole of the UK by entirely removing the Army from the Highlands.

The MOD has a self-stated core responsibility to project power, strategically and defensively, and that cannot be achieved by leaving such a vast and strategically important area as the Highlands without a military presence. The Highlands have suffered centuries of depopulation, and we need people. There will be a serious social impact when the personnel move away from the base. There are 500 Black Watch troops based in Fort George and the surrounding area. It is estimated that half of the children at Raigmore primary in Inverness are from military families. Fort George is a well-established part of the community and it regularly hosts charity events and supports veterans. I am a big rugby fan, so I know that Fort George has made a huge contribution to the fortunes of the Highland rugby club.

Closing the garrison will leave a gaping hole in the community, not least by leaving 200 empty homes in a part of the country that, as I said, has suffered from depopulation. It will severely impact on families who have put down roots in the region and made lives in the local community. It is therefore no surprise that there is strong community and public support for retaining Fort George as an active military barracks.

Before the announcement was made, Drew Hendry MP, in whose constituency Fort George lies—I assure members that he is another Highland MP with a very safe seat—organised a meeting at which Margaret Davidson, the leader of Highland Council, and I met with Sir Michael Fallon at the Ministry of Defence to outline the impact that the loss of the barracks would have on the local economy. *[Maree Todd has corrected this*

contribution. See end of report.] Drew Hendry has continued to work behind the scenes with MPs from different parties who believe that the approach is wrong headed—even Tory MPs—to call for an urgent rethink. Later this month, they hope to deliver joint petitions to the MOD, calling for an urgent reversal of the plans, although Tuesday's announcement of an election might make a difference to that.

As I mentioned, the Highlands have a long military tradition and have made a significant contribution to Army recruitment, especially in comparison with other parts of the country. The centralisation of the armed forces is likely to cause the recruitment contribution from the Highlands to dwindle, as local communities will not identify with the army.

The closure of Fort George will deal an almighty blow to the Highland economy and ultimately will affect thousands of local people. Highland Council estimates that more than 700 job losses will result from the army vacating Fort George, with a loss of income to the local economy of approximately £20 million.

We know from the MOD's figures that Fort George is the most cost-effective base to run. Fort George has the lowest maintenance bill of all Scotland's main infantry bases, according to figures obtained by the *Press and Journal*. Therefore, there is little evidence that closing Fort George will save the MOD money.

Edward Mountain *rose—*

Maree Todd: Finally—this is an important point—the cuts raise serious questions about the defence priorities of the UK Government, which can afford to renew Trident at a cost of hundreds of billions of pounds but is intent on selling off conventional bases around the country. The UK Government is attempting to save £1 billion by closing down dozens of barracks and cutting civilian jobs, to pay for a highly irresponsible and dangerous nuclear deterrent that the people of the Highlands and the rest of Scotland do not want.

That is yet another example of the Highland people's voices being ignored by Westminster. I told Sir Michael Fallon exactly that when I met him in London. *[Maree Todd has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* The wider Highlands offer a superb environment for infantry and special forces training. I warned that it would not be popular in the Highlands to remove the people while continuing to visit for training exercises and to use the bombing ranges.

That is not to mention the impact of the controversial Trident nuclear submarine's presence in our waters. The British underwater test and evaluation centre—BUTEC—range for submarine exercises off Applecross was

expanded in the last few years, with a huge impact on local fisherman. Right now, a new cable is being laid from there to the Butt of Lewis—as with the basing review, that has happened without consultation, notice or even, apparently, consideration of the impact on the fishermen who make their livings in the Minch. The fishermen do not even know whether they will be able to fish there after the cable has been laid.

I have to admit that I have been contacted by a very small number of people who say that they are glad to see the British army leave Fort George. As I said, it was built to quash Highland rebellion in the aftermath of the 1707 union between England and Scotland, which was—and I quote the BBC—
“highly unpopular with the vast majority of the population in Scotland.”

Sir Michael Fallon says that Fort George is no longer needed, because the Highlanders are no longer rebelling. Let us hope that David Stewart is nearer the truth of the situation and that the people of the Highlands stand up and say no to the decision.

15:57

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands (Con): I declare an interest in defence, not just because I was a soldier for 12 years but because my son is a serving soldier. My comments in this afternoon's debate will be based on my experiences. That is how I look at the defence rebasing.

At the outset, let me say that the motion for the debate shows the Government's true colours and its real obsession, which has nothing to do with defence. It shows the Government's indifference to the real issue, which is what is good for our servicemen. Let me be clearer: to argue purely the economic case for UK defence policy is misplaced. The question that we should be addressing is what is good for our service personnel. What is critical is how we ensure their professionalism. That, I am afraid, will not be achieved by sending servicemen to remote barracks.

It is simply not credible to argue that the fundamental requirement for basing is to ensure equality around the UK. To do so is puerile and smacks of localism and nationalism. What really matters is that we ensure that soldiers are based close to training areas, close to the formations with which they will deploy and, if possible, close to the families from which they come.

Let me give an example of where the current situation does not work. Soldiers in Inverness need to travel to training areas in England—perhaps as far as Salisbury plain or Otterburn in

Northumberland—to carry out unit-scale training or range practices.

The simple fact is that increased travel time reduces training time, and reduced training time leads to less effective service personnel. Let me ask a straightforward question of the people who want to promote historical basing: can they honestly say that they are happy to deploy into war zones service personnel who have not had sufficient training time, due to their need to base those personnel in remote locations?

Keith Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: I will just finish my point and then I will certainly take an intervention from an ex-soldier like me.

As a parent of a soldier who deployed recently to a police station in Helmand, I am no different from any other parent of soldiers deployed on active service. That argument cannot and will not be justified; it is very wrong.

I will take Mr Brown's intervention.

Keith Brown: I thank Edward Mountain for taking my intervention. I clarify that I have never been a soldier. I just want to make that clear.

On his point about people being close to training facilities, Maree Todd has just explained about the training facilities in the Highlands and the Barry Buddon training area has been mentioned. What is being sought is the removal of people from those military training establishments. If the member, as appears to be the case, does not oppose any of the closures, what is the difference between English Tories who are happy to oppose the closures in England, and all the Scottish Tories who are happy to support every closure that has been proposed by the MOD in Scotland?

Edward Mountain: We are talking about the training areas around Inverness, and we should be honest that the bombing ranges at Tain are a small-scale training area that, because of the nature of the ground that it is on, does not allow the unit at Fort George to deploy in its vehicles, which is its primary asset. It only allows infantry soldiers in small groups of no more than platoon or possibly company strength to deploy, which means that they cannot undertake unit training. The only places where they can undertake full unit, regimental training are places such as Otterburn and Salisbury Plain.

I am sorry; I thought that the cabinet secretary was a soldier but he was a marine, which is subtly different. We still served under the same flag.

Let us look at some facts. When I joined the army in 1980, there were about 200,000 soldiers and now the figure is reduced to just below

82,000. The navy has also reduced in size, as has the air force. As a result, there is no doubt that the defence estate needs to change and reduction and rationalisation are right.

I am now going to use a phrase that I have heard somebody else use. We have a once-in-generation opportunity—and I mean that—to rationalise the defence estate by moving units to where they can co-locate within the formations within which they will serve. We need to do that to reduce costs and to improve the retention of soldiers.

Ms Todd would not allow me to intervene on her, but I say to her that Fort George costs £1.6 million a year in maintenance. It is one of the most expensive bases in the UK to maintain, and I would be happy to produce letters from the MOD to prove that.

It also seems sensible, where possible, to build in more appropriate locations new barracks that could be funded by selling older barracks. It is also sensible to maintain barracks that are fit for purpose today, not hundreds of years ago. Current service personnel expect more from their barrack accommodation than they did when I joined. Quite rightly, 10-person barrack rooms are no longer acceptable. A style of flats with single rooms and shared communal facilities is now the norm. It is also clear that, where such facilities are not available, retaining soldiers is difficult. We would not expect to put up with that form of accommodation, so why should we ask them to?

Simply put, more training with good facilities co-located with units that regiments will deploy with, makes sense. It will increase effectiveness, and I humbly suggest that that could save lives.

Christine Grahame: Does Mr Mountain agree that his reference to accommodation does not apply to Glencorse barracks, where there is proper domestic accommodation for families that has recently been refurbished?

Edward Mountain: I will have to take the member's word for that as I have not been into every barracks. I have been into the barracks at Penicuik, where my son was stationed with 2 SCOTS. I defer to the member on that point.

Frankly, we should be careful about getting overemotional about buildings in the same way we do about regiments. I was delighted to learn this afternoon that Mr Crawford and I have a connection in the fact that his grandfather served—

Bruce Crawford: My father.

Edward Mountain: Sorry, it was Mr Crawford's father. I, too, served with the Household Cavalry, which is also my son's regiment.

However, that is not what this afternoon's debate is about—we are not talking about losing regiments. I am proud—as we all should be—that Scotland provides more than its fair share of the UK's armed forces.

I want to talk about Fort George, which is in the region that I represent. It is a pretty impressive place to store barrels of gunpowder and protect the resupply routes in the event of a Highland rebellion—as Maree Todd said. However, it is a pretty unimpressive place for a modern soldier to be based, with poor accommodation, appalling internet, lack of large local training areas, limited public transport to Inverness, and significant separation from friends and family for the Black Watch, which is a Perthshire regiment. One can see why regiments that have been based there suffer from retention problems.

The closure of Fort George in 2032 offers some significant opportunities. The fort is currently a significant visitor attraction and we can build on that. I would campaign to keep the museum there and then look at all the other possible options. The positive fact is that we have 15 years to construct a workable plan.

With that in mind I would like to announce that in the past few months I have been working hard, liaising with Mark Lancaster—the MP who has been dealing with rebasing—on the subject of Fort George. We both agree that we need to establish a group of local politicians and businesses to work out how the fort and the service accommodation in Inverness can be best developed to serve the Highlands.

The question is whether the other Highland MSPs from other political parties are prepared to join me and my colleagues in the endeavour to do something with Fort George, rather than sitting ineffectually on the sidelines debating whether a 300-year-old fort is the right place to base soldiers in the 21st century.

16:06

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): For Arbroath and RM Condor there is a touch of *déjà vu* about the discussion. No sooner have we digested the detail of a basing review and listened to a pronouncement from the UK Government on the future of the facility than fresh uncertainty emerges. It was just five months ago that the results of the latest basing review were announced and we were told that although the airfield at RM Condor was to be sold, the remainder of the facility in my constituency was safe from the axe. As I said when the cabinet secretary made his initial statement on the outcome of the review, from a commercial perspective, I wonder who

might want to buy an airfield within a Royal Marines base, given the likely security restrictions.

However, let us acknowledge—taking account of the closure notices that are being served on Fort George, Glencorse, Redford barracks and others, and that Scotland is losing one fifth of its defence estate—that there was a sense of relief locally. Therefore, when shortly before the recess the Parliamentary Bureau scheduled the debate, I wondered for a moment whether others might have more that I to contribute, but then came the revelations in *The Times* that the MOD was facing a £10 billion shortfall and the “financially struggling” Royal Marines would be reduced in size and capability—so, off we go again. The story claimed that the most direct impact would fall on 42 Commando, which is based in Plymouth, with the unit taking on a training role, rather than acting in rotation with 40 Commando and with 45 Commando, which is based in Arbroath. However, we were also told that 200 marines would be lost to the service through failure to replace them, and when the defence secretary appeared on “The Andrew Marr Show” he failed to rule out cutting the number of marines.

Earlier this year, during a visit to Condor, Sir Michael Fallon insisted the base was safe. If one was to ask the UK Government today, I expect that it would stand by that commitment. However, it is worth considering comments that were made a few weeks ago by Sir Michael, on a visit to RMB Chivenor—home to the Commando Logistic Regiment—which, it had been announced, was set to close under the basing review. He claimed that no final decision had yet been reached, but pointed out, significantly, that the airfield there is no longer in use. He continued:

“The overall intent, and I want to be honest about that, is to move units towards Plymouth and Devonport.”

The fact that an airfield's being dispensed with is used to justify a closure sits alongside acknowledgement that the direction of travel for the Royal Marines—as we have all known for some time—is consolidation in the south of England.

My Westminster colleague Mike Weir MP has called on the defence secretary to spell out the genuine long-term plans for Condor. I back that call, for economic and security reasons. As the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work does, Mike Weir and I fear that there is a chipping away at the viability of the base, especially with the artillery battery already having been earmarked for removal.

Continuing the Conservatives' constitutional obsession, Maurice Golden harked back to the last independence referendum. Sir Michael's predecessor, Phillip Hammond, also made a flying

visit to Condor, during the run-up to the 2014 referendum, to commit to the future of the base. Three years on, we in Angus are anxious to learn whether that commitment meant anything or might yet turn out to be another broken Better Together promise.

Before anyone suggests that that is scaremongering, let me point out some of the recent history pertaining to Condor. We were here before, in 2004, as the MOD reviewed Condor's status under a rationalisation programme. Its future was looked at again in 2009, before it was concluded that, at a cost of between £60 million and £100 million, relocating 45 Commando to the south-west of England would be "inappropriate and unaffordable". Two years later, however, as the MOD sought to address a funding shortfall via a strategic defence review, we were told that the Royal Marines would make that very move—albeit with an Army unit moving into Condor. However, when we got to 2013, it emerged that the switch had been abandoned, because moving 45 Commando south did not represent value for money and the Army did not require the Arbroath facility for a base. Now, the airfield is to go, with potential consequences, as a result. By any measure, the UK Government's approach to Condor is haphazard and unsettling, and it is unfair on the marines and their families.

On the subject of fair treatment, let us consider another aspect of the issue: namely, the responsibility that the UK Government—indeed, any Government—has to ensure that service bases are properly maintained. Earlier this year, it was claimed that the Royal Corps of Signals's new recruits who were trying to grapple with complex signalling equipment were so cold that training was being hindered. Chronic boiler failures at the RAF headquarters in High Wycombe had forced more than 120 personnel to live with intermittent hot water and central heating for three years, and there were problems at the Royal Artillery barracks in Woolwich. That article followed a story that revealed that crumbling boilers at the home of the Foot Guards in central London meant that soldiers were being forced to perform ceremonial duties at Buckingham palace having not showered for days. It has since emerged that guardsmen were also using both their field-issue sleeping bags and normal bedclothes in an effort to keep warm at night.

Last year, Westminster's Public Accounts Committee described contractor CarillionAmey as "badly letting down service families", and said that its performance was "totally unacceptable".

However, a CarillionAmey source told *The Daily Telegraph* that problems were being exacerbated

because the MOD preferred to commission what the source described as "firefighting" repairs, rather than to pay to replace outdated equipment on any significant scale.

I highlight those essentially English issues because they have spilled over into Scotland. When personnel returned to RM Condor after Christmas, they discovered that there was no hot water or heating in some of the quarters because two boilers had conked out. Although repairs in one block had been carried out by February, the repairs in the other block were not completed until March.

I do not know about other members, but I do not think that that is an acceptable situation for our military personnel to find themselves in. Up our way, you see, we hold our service personnel in high regard. David Stewart was right to speak about the social covenant. Yes—there will be the odd flare-up in the community in social settings but, overall, the relationship between the marines and the local public is good.

Just a few weeks ago, 45 Commando used its freedom of Angus status to parade through Arbroath to commemorate its having been based there for 45 years. That honour was given to it in 2003 in recognition of its long service and the close association that the unit has enjoyed with the area. Unfortunately, the parade took place on a Parliament sitting day, so I was unable to attend. However, this debate affords me an opportunity to record my support for 45 Commando. It is part of the fabric of Arbroath and wider Angus, and many former marines and their families choose to remain in the area when their service comes to an end.

It is entirely appropriate that the current marines had the opportunity to mark their strong connection with the area by marching through the town centre. However, we in Angus expect the MOD and the UK Government—any UK Government—to have the same regard for the unit and to provide it with appropriate facilities. I acknowledge that, in the light of recent problems and Mike Weir's intervention, the MOD has now committed to replacing some other boilers on the base. Most important is that we need a degree of certainty about the unit's future, so I look forward to the Government responding to my MP colleague's call.

16:14

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): The debate can become rather emotional because some members have experience in the armed forces and some do not. However, it is important to understand that at the heart of the debate are the needs of the soldiers, airmen and seamen who

serve in our armed forces and who, in many cases, put their lives on the line, and the needs of their families, which is an aspect that is near and dear to my heart.

As a councillor in Argyll and Bute Council and the armed forces and veterans champion for the council, I know how important it was that the armed forces community covenant was implemented, which was done in June 2011 by a Conservative Government. The then Prime Minister recognised how important it was that we gave a commitment to the armed forces and their families.

During my military service, I continually experienced rebasing of units—it was a threat to which we had constantly to adapt. As has been said, the MOD estate covers 424,000 hectares, which is nearly 2 per cent of the United Kingdom's entire land area, and costs £2.5 billion a year to maintain. In that context, it must be acknowledged that the MOD estate is now too large and unwieldy to manage and no longer matches the requirements of our world-class 21st century military force. The armed forces have been reduced in size by about 30 per cent since the start of the century, but the defence estate has reduced in size by only 9 per cent. Basically, there is too much land under the MOD's management.

Current trends are completely unsustainable in the long term, so something must be done to fix that problem. For example, the Redford infantry and cavalry barracks are no longer large enough to accommodate larger units such as air assault battalions and brigades, and battle groups, with the phenomenal amount of equipment that such units have. However, the Secretary of State for Defence has said to me that Dregghorn barracks is a more modern barracks that has had a lot of investment recently and is available to be expanded. Reductions have to be made in the MOD estate, no matter how difficult the task might be.

It is important that we have the correct amount of estate to match the armed forces' needs. We must create a defence estate that is more efficient and which helps our armed forces to deliver more effective military capability. That must be the sole objective when deciding where military bases should be located. As I said in an intervention earlier, it is important that regular and reserve forces have access in particular to airfields and ports so that they can move at 24 or 48 hours' notice, as politicians require. Operational needs and requirements must therefore be taken into consideration when deciding where military bases are located.

It is important that bases are fit for our armed forces, which deserve world-class bases from which to operate. For example, I will meet the

command team from Faslane tomorrow to start on plans for developing a sports hub for the military and civilian communities in Helensburgh, which will also enhance the health of our submarine force personnel.

It is not right that more than 40 per cent of the MOD's built assets are more than 50 years old: we need to adjust that figure. Our troops should no longer be required to use barracks that are grade A listed buildings, such as Fort George, which I know well personally, and which members might know about from having read the novel "Tunes of Glory" or the stories about Private McAuslan. Fort George might be a wonderful place and have a fantastic history, but such places are very expensive to maintain, so we need to move on from using them as barracks.

Keith Brown: I seek clarity because I am genuinely puzzled. How can it be the case that every Conservative parliamentarian here supports all the closures while many Conservative parliamentarians in England are working with other parties to oppose closures? How can all the Conservatives in Scotland be right on the issue? What is the difference between Scotland and the rest of the country in that regard?

Maurice Corry: The English situation might be slightly different. I am not entirely aware of it. However, as far as Scotland is concerned, the Scottish Parliament is addressing Scottish matters. The Conservatives have a view as a parliamentary group and our comments are based on that. That is where we are. I will not address English issues—which are exactly what Mr Brown referred to.

David Stewart: Maurice Corry said that access to ports and airports is crucial. Does not he recognise that Fort George has excellent access to both?

Maurice Corry: Fort George might have access to a port, but it is not big enough for requirements.

It is important that we listen to our soldiers, and I have listened to the soldiers of 3 SCOTS battalion the Black Watch, my old regiment, who want to be closer to their regimental areas of Fife, Perth and Edinburgh. We need to take cognisance of their views, as well.

David Stewart: Maurice Corry made a distinct statement about the port to which Fort George has access not being large enough. I have quite a lot of experience of dealing with Inverness harbour and, indeed, other harbours in the Highlands and Islands. Can the member evidence for Parliament that Inverness harbour is not large enough for MOD requirements? I have not picked up from any direction that Inverness harbour is not large enough to cope with MOD requirements.

Maurice Corry: I thank David Stewart. I hear what he says and I would like to look into the matter, but as far as I am concerned, most movements are now air portable. That is why we have the C-17 Galaxy-equivalent heavy-lift aircraft, and it is why Kinloss and particularly Lossiemouth are so important. The main movements are by air.

It is important to think of the soldiers and bring them closer to their regimental areas, as I said earlier with regard to 3 SCOTS the Black Watch. No soldier should be expected to sleep inside monuments that were built to fight the Jacobite rebellions. The strategy that the Secretary of State for Defence has announced will see that coming to an end—and not before time.

Thanks to the savings from the Ministry of Defence's estate optimisation strategy, there will be investment of more than £4 billion across the UK, of which £1.7 billion is for bases here in Scotland, as has been said. That will provide more jobs and opportunities for people right across Scotland.

The £1.3 billion upgrades to HMNB Clyde, which is soon to be the home of the entire submarine force, will see upgrades to its waterfront, its engineering support facilities, its accommodation and its physical security—there is also the health project that I have mentioned I will be discussing tomorrow—ahead of the Dreadnought class submarines arriving in Scotland. I note that £3.6 million of the money will be used to examine the best options for developing a new submarine school at HMNB Clyde. I have, in my councillor role, been involved in securing that school's coming to the area. It will mean that the number of military and civilian jobs at the base will rise by nearly 2,000, from the current 6,800 to about 8,200 by 2022. That is good news for my entire region of West Scotland. Thanks to that UK Government commitment, Scotland will become the home of Britain's submarine fleet and its training centre.

As members know, a further £400 million is to be invested in RAF Lossiemouth, whose runways, taxiways and accommodation will be upgraded—all the time we are seeing accommodation being upgraded; we are thinking of our servicemen and our troops and what is going to be good for them—in anticipation of the nine Poseidon P-8 maritime patrol aircraft and the additional Typhoons that are coming. RAF Lossiemouth continues to host one of the RAF's three main fast-jet operating bases. By 2024, at least 400 extra personnel will be based at RAF Lossiemouth as a result of the marine patrol aircraft and the additional Typhoon squadron being based there.

Leuchars station will be expanded to become a main hub. We are upgrading our railways, and it is important that we have that to ensure that we can

move heavy equipment. Leuchars will be home to one of the Army's operational engagement and resilience infantry brigades.

As I have highlighted, the consolidation of the defence estate in Scotland is allowing the United Kingdom to invest significantly in better facilities to support the men and women of our armed forces, and to address the needs of our defence forces in their roles both at home and overseas. It means that we can focus on giving our troops the equipment that they need to get the job done, and that we can effectively use the money that we save by finding the most efficient way to operate our defence estate and our bases.

The Secretary of State has received his advice from defence chiefs—the people who know what is needed operationally. The Prime Minister says constantly when she refers to defence matters that she listens to her defence chiefs, who are the experts in the field.

As is noted in the amendment that my colleague Jackson Carlaw lodged, Scotland's industry will benefit massively from access to UK defence procurement spending, thanks to our Conservative Government. In Scotland, defence procurement spending accounts for the employment of 11,000 people.

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

Maurice Corry: Yes. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The reason why the work in Stirling will no longer exist—the 26 Command workshop—is that the Defence Support Group contract is bringing the jobs into the bases, close to the units. That is the modern way of doing it. The SNP would put all that in jeopardy with independence. I am talking about long-term employment for the future. For example, MacTaggart Scott employ 32 apprentices.

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

Maurice Corry: That is the sort of long-term commitment that the UK Government is making to highly skilled jobs in Scotland, and it is also helping our veterans.

The MOD has signed a contract with BAE Systems, as members know, for the offshore patrol vessels—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Corry, you really must come to a close.

Maurice Corry: —and there is the investment in the type 26 frigates.

It is thanks to our Conservative Government making Scotland a defence priority that Scotland

will continue to lead the way in defending our country from the air, land and sea. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Corry!

Maurice Corry: That is why I support Jackson Carlaw's amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It would help if members occasionally drew breath to allow me to come in and ask them to close. *[Laughter.]*

We move to the last of the open speeches. I am sure that Christine Grahame will be very disciplined.

16:24

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): There is always a first time.

I am pleased to take part in this debate. It is perhaps ironic timing that a parliamentary visit programme was launched yesterday by the Presiding Officer, encouraging MSPs to visit defence bases to learn more about the issues facing service personnel and their families. The press release says:

"The aim of the programme is for MSPs to better understand the range of social and welfare issues relevant to armed forces personnel and their families, within their community."

If only the MOD would do the same.

I will visit and learn about the issues faced by service personnel and their families in the light of the proposed closure of Glencorse barracks in my constituency—incidentally, as has been pointed out, it has been home to the Army for some 150 years, is currently home to 552 service personnel and is very much part of the Penicuik and Midlothian community. Why should it not be, after 150 years? Indeed, when the soldiers have returned from Afghanistan or whatever areas of conflict they have been in, there has always been a parade through Penicuik.

Notice of the proposed closure first came by letter to me on 7 November, the day of the announcement. The same was true for my colleague Owen Thompson MP. As a result, I find it quite strange that the Tory amendment talks about believing

"that the UK Government should continue to engage fully with the Scottish Government, local authorities and local communities on the review".

There was no engagement, and any subsequent engagement has occurred only in response to contact from elected representatives such as me.

The impact on the local economy will be significant, but I say to Maurice Corry that what

causes concern is the decanting of families from a community in which they are welcome and settled.

Returning to the Tory amendment, I note that it refers to

"the sensible aims of updating the defence estate to be more capability focused and better suited to the needs of modern armed forces".

The same line was repeated in parliamentary undersecretary of state Mark Lancaster MP's letter of 5 December 2016 in response to my correspondence. That letter says:

"much of the infrastructure is old, inefficient and no longer able to meet the needs of the armed forces".

In other words—to paraphrase Jackson Carlaw—it should be on some heritage tour. However, as others have pointed out, a £60 million upgrade of Glencorse was carried out between 2003 and 2005, and it was hailed by the MOD as "benchmark accommodation", with associated facilities for soldiers and their families including a gym, squash courts and a sports field. A short walk from the camp there are 150 houses, including officers service family accommodation and two specifically adapted bungalows for wheelchair users.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: Bear with me a minute.

There are three and four-bedroomed houses with garages and fenced gardens; the children attend Mauricewood primary school, as they have for generations; and recently wives and partners, who are quite often disengaged from things and are unable to take up employment because of the peripatetic nature of the armed forces, have become involved in a start-up programme run by Women's Enterprise Scotland in which they can begin to develop businesses for themselves. The cabinet secretary and I have seen that programme in action—it has received funding again not just from Women's Enterprise Scotland but from Midlothian business gateway—and it builds confidence in the women to start up businesses.

That community is such a part of and so supported by Midlothian, with accommodation that is well fit for purpose, that its being on a hit list is quite disgraceful. To say that it will not be closed until 2032 means nothing; there is no guarantee that closure is that far away, and in the meantime, what will happen to the maintenance of those facilities and the morale of the families in the barracks?

So why close the barracks? It cannot be the estate's unfitness—I have just made that clear. Frankly, it is just to raise money from the selling off of these prime sites for housing developments. In the big defence picture of the billions being committed to Trident, the situation is quite farcical,

but the fact is that the UK does not have a good track record of looking after its servicemen and women and their families during and, indeed, after conflict. It even got to the point that, in the first Iraq war, soldiers did not even have proper footwear and were being sent food parcels by their families. If we fast-forward to the second Iraq conflict, we find soldiers being sent out into minefields in vehicles with underbellies that offered no protection from improvised explosive devices. The MOD has had to be shamed into the care and support of returning service personnel. There are too many ex-service personnel living rough on our streets, sleeping on park benches or being rehoused in our prisons.

Of course, on the plus side, Scotland was promised—along with Trident renewal—the building of type 26 frigates, which would secure work on the Clyde and which we were told was under threat if we voted for independence. The number that will be built has now been cut to eight, and the work has not started. No surprises there. The report, “Restoring the Fleet: Naval Procurement and the National Shipbuilding Strategy” says:

“It is clear to us that the delays in the construction of the Type 26 have had a negative impact on the development of the workforce on the Clyde.”

The closure of Glencorse and other barracks fits into a picture of Scotland’s primary defence role as one in which it houses weapons of mass destruction well away from the south-east but just 20 miles from the biggest city in Scotland. The rest is just empty promises and expediency. In the meantime, those weapons of mass destruction are useless against the committed terrorist sitting on a bus with a lethal backpack or driving a lorry into a crowd. But never mind: we should sleep sound in our beds at night because it is only Donald Trump who has his finger on the Trident trigger. When the chips are down, let us just send our troops into those conflict zones where we politicians have failed, and perhaps—just perhaps—they might have the right boots on their feet and vehicles that are not death traps. With regard to their accommodation on their return, the MOD knows best.

As for Glencorse, with closure hanging over it, what is going to happen over those years? In the meantime, with the exception of the Tories, all the local politicians—the councillors, the MP, the MSPs and I—will stand up, along with the entire community, and speak for the military personnel when they cannot, for obvious reasons, speak up for themselves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. It is disappointing to note that not all who participated in the debate are back in the chamber for the start of them.

16:32

David Stewart: This has been an excellent debate, with thoughtful and insightful speeches from across the chamber. Of course, some members, such as Mike Rumbles, Maurice Corry, Edward Mountain and the cabinet secretary, are ex-service personnel, and I believe that their contributions mirrored the depth and the range of their significant experience in their previous occupations. However, other members without military experience also spoke with passion and commitment about the importance of the military footprint in Scotland.

The cabinet secretary kicked off the debate by talking about the 20 per cent reduction in the defence estate, the reduction in the military footprint in Scotland and the role of the regional hubs. He also expressed concern about the issue of the Condor airfield in Arbroath and the fact that, in large parts of Scotland, the Army will have no footprint at all. He usefully raised the issue of the working party, which involves local authorities. I would be interested to hear the outcome of its work.

Jackson Carlaw and I could perhaps form a club for people who, in their school days, failed to join the RAF—perhaps we should form a support group to counsel ourselves about our career choices. On a serious note, he raised important issues from the 2015 strategic defence review and talked about the 91 sites that were earmarked for closure.

Like many members, Gordon MacDonald talked with passion and commitment about base closures in his local area and spoke about the importance of keeping army barracks in his constituency.

Maurice Golden made some valid points at the start of his speech about recognising the historic reputation of the work that the men and women of our armed forces carry out now and have carried out in the past. On a general level, he talked about the importance of getting defence infrastructure right in the future, which involves a long-term plan.

Stewart Stevenson entertained us, as always, but he also made a significant contribution to the debate. He raised an issue with which I have common cause, which is the impact of the armed forces, particularly the RAF, in the Moray area. As always, he had a relative who he could bring into the debate. I think that the year he mentioned was 1890—

Stewart Stevenson: About a hundred years earlier.

David Stewart: I will go back to school and remember the dates at a better time. Stewart Stevenson made a valid point about the threats in the future of non-state actors and the worries

about violence, fear and hatred and concerns about ISIS and North Korea, as well as about the importance of mobile forces. He might have slightly misquoted the reference, but he cited a point made by a famous German military strategist, that no plan ever survives the first contact with the enemy.

Mark Ruskell made some valid points about the relationship between Governments—not just national Governments, but local government, which has an important role. I note that this is probably his last meeting before he gives up being a councillor, so he will no longer have to declare that interest. He said that, when bases are going to close, irrespective of the campaigning that has been done, we must consider how we can mitigate the effects of local base closures in the long term. He also made some valid points about the other side of the equation in Stirling, which concerns the importance of affordable housing and how we can try to put the two issues together. He also referred to a game of cat and mouse being played by the UK Government, and a common theme that has arisen this afternoon is the question of where the consultation has been from the UK Government. Many members made that point.

Bruce Crawford has a lot of experience in the military and a lot of understanding of local defence issues. He talked about the 20 per cent reduction in the defence footprint, his local base and the importance of repairing and upgrading its functions, the impact on Stirling if the base closes, and the high connectivity between the armed forces and the community in Stirling over many years. Another common theme in the debate has been personal links with the military, and Bruce Crawford mentioned his father, who I think I am right in saying was in the Household Cavalry.

Bruce Crawford: I did not get a chance to respond to one of the points that Mark Ruskell made, but I entirely agree with him that one of the good things that will come from the proposal is that Trident will no longer be able to use Stirling as a base when it passes through.

David Stewart: I shall move on swiftly.

We heard from Mike Rumbles, who also has lots of experience, having been in the Army for 15 years in his previous life. He talked about Glencorse being his first posting, and he made some valid points about the economic effects of the closure of the bases, and supported the regional hubs. I do not think that anyone is suggesting that everything that the UK Government is suggesting is negative. There are some military and strategic advantages to having the regional hubs, but I emphasise that our current and future capabilities must meet the new threats. As the facts change, so do our opinions. It is critical to stress that. Mr Rumbles also mentioned

the importance of getting our estates strategy right in future.

Edward Mountain was a soldier for 12 years and has a son currently serving. His key point, which in general terms I agree with, was that it is important to consider what is good for our service personnel. He made a general point about Fort George. He and I are on opposite sides of the argument, but I concede that setting up a working party is a good idea, and I would certainly volunteer for that. He said that those who want to see Fort George stay open are effectively chirping from the sidelines—I am not sure whether I am included in that—but the last time that I looked that was called democracy and campaigning. That minor point aside, I would be happy to sign up to Mr Mountain's working party if he could arrange it.

Graeme Dey made some excellent points about the long-term plans for Condor, as he is worried about the constant chipping away. Maurice Corry, another member with experience of Army service, spoke with authority about getting a more efficient defence estate and looking at regular and reserve forces. I promise that next Christmas I will give Mr Corry a watch, because he is not very good at keeping time.

Finally, I want to mention Christine Grahame, who talked about the armed forces scheme being set up in the Scottish Parliament. I strongly endorse that. She made excellent points about Glencorse and its facilities and about the importance of the partners who are involved in the business support group. She finished by saying that it is a disgrace that the base is closing. As always, I will give Christine Grahame the last word. I normally do not get the first word either.

16:39

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Like Mark Ruskell, I declare an interest as a serving councillor—in Moray, in my case—until 4 May, when I will relinquish that position.

My home in Alves in Moray sits between two significant armed forces establishments. To the west, we have the Army barracks at Kinloss, which is home to the 39 Engineer Regiment; and, to the east, we have RAF Lossiemouth, a Typhoon main operating base, which is preparing itself for the arrival of nine new Boeing P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

Moray has a long and proud military history, and I will highlight the importance of that history to the area. The SNP motion would lead people to believe that the UK Government only delivers bad news for Scotland yet, day in, day out, I see significant investment in Moray and the impact that that has in the local communities.

While we are talking about bad news, some news is bad not because of what it reports but because of its dodgy origins. I am, of course, talking about the shameful actions of Moray's SNP MP, Angus Robertson. Looking for cheap headlines and to stir up a frenzy, Mr Robertson said that an "impeccable source" had told him that Kinloss was to close. The community was understandably concerned. A task force was established, and personnel and their family were left unsure of their futures. In the end, the base did not close. Far from being an "impeccable source", Angus Robertson has never established any basis for his claims and months of uncertainty were caused for no reason. Today, the cabinet secretary repeated those concerns when he said that it was a last-minute decision to save Kinloss. Where did he hear that?

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

Douglas Ross: I will give way in a minute. The cabinet secretary used much of his speech to say how little engagement there had been with the UK Government. He said that the UK Government did not engage with him or the Scottish Government, so where did he hear that there was a last-minute deal? Do we have another impeccable source?

I would rather rely on what was said in the House of Commons by Sir Michael Fallon, the defence secretary, who confirmed:

"Contrary to some speculation and unnecessary scaremongering, Kinloss will be retained."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 7 November 2016; Vol 616, c 1287.]

That is an impeccable source.

Keith Brown: Is it the case that, like his colleagues here, Douglas Ross, in addition to deserting the field before the battle to retain Kinloss was won by people such as Angus Robertson, refused to oppose any of the proposed closures and that, unlike his colleagues south of the border who are campaigning against closures, he will simply fall into line?

Douglas Ross: I was hoping that the cabinet secretary would stand up and ask me that question, because I can say that I fought to retain Kinloss. Maybe the mask is slipping and the cabinet secretary now accepts that there was no threat to Kinloss if he is saying that my opposition to the closure—and I stood side by side with all politicians in opposition to closure—was not needed because the SNP had made up the claims. Indeed, Mr Brown's mask is slipping.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Douglas Ross: No. Ms Adamson has just walked into the debate, so I will not take an intervention from her.

Although I acknowledge that SNP members want only to look at the negatives in the debate, I hope that they can accept the positives. I challenge any SNP MSP to stand up and say that the decision for Boeing and the UK Government to work together and to build a new £100 million operational support and training base in Lossiemouth is a bad thing. I challenge them to stand up and suggest that the creation of more than 100 new jobs with that investment will not be good for Moray. I challenge them to stand up and suggest that the 400 additional personnel who will be based at RAF Lossiemouth by 2024 will not have a positive effect on that region. I am happy to give way to any member who wants to criticise that investment.

Bruce Crawford: Has the member got his nomination papers in yet? When he stands for Westminster and does not win, will he leave this place?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but I thought that you were going to say that that was an inappropriate remark from someone of Mr Crawford's experience. We are debating the serious issue of basing reviews, and I will confine my remarks to that. If the SNP is worried about who is going to stand for the Conservatives in Moray, I will let them stew over that for a wee while longer.

We have seen significant investment in Moray by the UK Government. All that could be in jeopardy with an independent Scotland. As Jackson Carlaw's amendment clearly states, an independent Scotland would have a "very limited" military footprint, which would weaken our defence of the nation. I do not want that for Moray, I do not want that for Scotland, and I do not want that for the United Kingdom.

It is telling that, throughout the debate, not a single SNP member mentioned defence in an independent Scotland, despite that issue being part of one of the amendments on which we will vote this afternoon. That is because the SNP's plans are indefensible. Indeed, a number of people have confirmed that we would have a small military footprint if we had an independent Scotland. The SNP cannot answer the problems that that would bring.

I accept that, as a number of members have said, there have been difficult decisions to take during the defence review, but I also see, day in, day out, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, the impact that our armed forces have in our local communities. They do their jobs and we have to deliver for them a defence estate that is efficient, modern and capability focused.

I will quickly mention some of the remarks that have been made during the debate. Jackson Carlaw was quite right to highlight the defence footprint across the United Kingdom, which amounts to 420,000 hectares. He also said that the reduction in the defence footprint in the UK is more significant than the reduction that we have seen in Scotland.

David Stewart told us about his experience on some aircraft. He told us that he has been on a maritime aircraft—a Sea King—which gives me the opportunity to say that I became the first UK politician to fly in one of the Poseidon P-8s, which I am proud of. I appreciate the opportunity to add to the remarks made by Mr Stewart.

Maurice Golden spoke about the historic and on-going defence of the nation by the MOD.

Stewart Stevenson spoke about Moray bases, neither of which are in his Banffshire and Buchan Coast constituency. I am left to wonder whether he was asked to mention them because the Moray MSP, Richard Lochhead, has not attended today's debate.

Stewart Stevenson: That is a disgrace. He is at a funeral. The member should withdraw that remark.

Douglas Ross: I will withdraw it. If Mr Lochhead is not able to be here because he is at a funeral, I apologise. It is important to get that on the record, because people in Moray would have been concerned that their Moray MSP was not here. I am grateful for the opportunity to explain to them why he was not in the chamber to speak about a hugely important issue for Moray.

Mark Ruskell gave his opinion on opposing Trident, but he did not explain why more Scots support Trident than oppose it.

Bruce Crawford mentioned a city deal and MOD rationalisation. Although I accept his concerns about the timing, it was good to hear him agree with the general principles.

Mike Rumbles spoke about his 15 years in the Army and highlighted the important issue of family life for service families and the benefits that he believes could be gained by stabilising Army life with the consolidation of three primary hubs.

Maree Todd would not take a single intervention—I tried, tried and tried, but she would not take a single one. Could that be because, in an eight-minute speech, she could not bring herself to welcome the huge investment by the UK Government in Moray, which is an area that she represents as part of the Highlands and Islands region?

Edward Mountain, with his experience in the armed forces, is now hoping to convene a task

force involving local politicians and businesses. I was grateful to hear David Stewart volunteer to join that group, which I will also be happy to join. I am sure that other politicians will join forces with it, too.

Maurice Corry, in a brief contribution, mentioned his armed forces career. He has continued to be an armed forces champion as a councillor on Argyll and Bute Council. He rightly highlighted the important point that decisions are taken on the advice of defence chiefs.

I will finish by saying how proud we all are of what the military does in Scotland, in the UK and around the world to protect us. We are equally proud to call members of the military our friends and neighbours and to work with them locally. I hope that our service personnel know after today's debate that, regardless of the political points that have been made by all parties, we are indebted to them for their service, their sacrifices and their support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Keith Brown to close the debate.

16:48

Keith Brown: I thank all those who made helpful contributions to the debate. As I said when I opened the debate, these are far-reaching defence cuts—perhaps the most far-reaching defence cuts ever made in Scotland. They will have a detrimental impact across Scotland and all of us in the chamber have a responsibility to the communities that we represent to make our collective voice heard on this issue.

I cannot think why, and I have not had an answer to this, not a single Conservative MSP—

Douglas Ross: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I will finish the point. I will take your intervention in a second.

Not a single Tory MSP will oppose a single closure, while your colleagues south of the border feel perfectly able to stand up for their communities alongside representatives of other parties. I will give way to Douglas Ross on that point.

Douglas Ross: Will you clarify your remarks, then? You can confirm that I opposed the closure of Kinloss. You are saying that that was a genuine closure. If that did not happen, why can you not accept that I opposed that closure and that that is an example of Conservatives working in their constituencies to oppose these closures?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind everyone, yet again, that there are no private

conversations between people during a debate: you should always speak through the chair.

Keith Brown: My understanding of what Douglas Ross said is that the proposed closure was never going to happen, but that he prevented it. That is just bizarre. Not only did he not prevent it but, long before the decision was taken, he deserted the field and said that it was done and safe.

Douglas Ross: No.

Keith Brown: I am confident from my sources that that was a last-minute decision and it was overturned.

Douglas Ross: Who are the sources?

Keith Brown: If you are not confident and you do not know your story, you should talk to your ministers in the Conservative Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, cabinet secretary.

Keith Brown: Presiding Officer, the Conservative members should talk to their own ministers and Government. They have obviously not been doing that or they would know the story.

In the case of HM Naval Base Clyde, the Scottish Government's position on the nuclear deterrent is well known. I did not mention that at the start of my speech, because I tried initially—perhaps that was foolish—to see whether there was common ground between us.

Edward Mountain: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: Not just now; I will try to make some progress.

That was my approach at the start, but it was immediately exploded by a dire diatribe from Jackson Carlaw, which was very poorly informed. [*Interruption.*] Can I make some progress, please?

For some years, he will regret his description of the bases that are to be closed as a “heritage tour”. We heard in eloquent terms from Christine Grahame about the relevance and importance of the bases to local communities, and communities across the country will now know the Conservative view. Describing the bases as a “heritage tour” drips contempt for the people who are trying to maintain the link with the armed forces in their communities.

We saw right away which way the Conservatives would go in the debate, which was straight to the constitution, as they are utterly obsessed by it. It was not mentioned in my motion, as we were trying to have a debate about a decision on closing bases, but the Conservatives went off in their usual way.

Edward Mountain: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No, I will not.

Why can no single Conservative MSP muster any opposition to any of the closures, whereas their colleagues south of the border seem to have a spine? Perhaps their colleagues have collective ownership of the Tory spine this week, but at least they can oppose the closures, whereas Tory MSPs cannot.

There has been no opposition from the Conservatives and that will haunt them in the next two months. During the course of the election, people will want to put questions to Conservative council and parliamentary candidates about why they have supinely allowed the closures to take place.

David Stewart made a good contribution, pointing out the fact that the issue is about communities. Edward Mountain said that it is not about buildings and I agree that it is about people—those who serve in the armed forces and the communities that work with them.

For the past seven years, I have been the Scottish Government's veterans minister and, at each event—including the armed forces visit scheme event this week that was mentioned by David Stewart—I have been able to say that we have a consensus in this Parliament. All the parties respect and support the members of our armed services. That is perhaps the most important point of the debate.

However, we heard from Maurice Golden that all military personnel are “expendable” to people such as me and others in the SNP. I ask him to think about that and I have two things to say. First, I found that profoundly offensive and, hearing what Bruce Crawford had to say about his son and his father, I think that many other people would, too. I am not saying that my finding it offensive would worry the Tories too much.

Maurice Golden should know that veterans and those in the armed forces are very grateful for the fact that, although we have fundamental disagreements on Trident and other aspects, we at least agree on that basic point of respect and support for the armed forces. I will give him the chance now or later during my speech to intervene and clarify his remarks. I am sure that he cannot mean that the SNP thinks that every member of the armed forces is expendable. I am happy to give him an intervention if he wants to come back in and correct that. If not, it certainly changes my script with regard to what I can say to veterans, the armed forces and the outside world about the views that are held in this Parliament.

Mike Rumbles made a bizarre intervention and said that it is the SNP's fault that the closures are taking place. I think that his logic was that SNP MPs had failed to prevent it.

Mike Rumbles: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Keith Brown: If I can just make the point, I will let Mike Rumbles come in afterwards.

Perhaps it was Ming Campbell's fault, as the original decision on Leuchars was his, or perhaps it is to Mike Weir's credit that we have kept 45 Commando so far. It made no sense at all and it shows the desperate lengths to which Mike Rumbles will go to protect the Conservatives—potential coalition partners—rather than talk about the important issue, which is the closure of the bases.

Mike Rumbles: I think that the minister is deliberately misunderstanding the point that I made. I would have thought that, if 50-odd MPs in the House of Commons worked together with the UK Government on such issues, they could influence events, but it is obvious that they have not done so or have not been able to do so.

Keith Brown: That confirms to everyone how bizarre Mike Rumbles's intervention was.

It always seems to be a Conservative Government. Graeme Dey spoke about the chopping and changing that has happened in the UK Government's approach to military bases from 2010 until now, as did Gordon MacDonald. It goes back further than that in relation to 45 Commando, of course. I remember that, in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher wanted to abolish the entire Royal Marines corps. This has gone on for a long period of time. It seems to me that we could have had a bit of consensus with perhaps a different approach from the Conservatives in Scotland or even the same approach taken by their colleagues south of the border, who are willing to oppose what has been proposed. Unfortunately, we have not had that today.

Edward Mountain: The cabinet secretary accuses us of taking one line on the issue. Are there any bases in Scotland that he thinks are not fit for purpose and that should perhaps be considered for closure to benefit the troops who are posted there?

Keith Brown: That is a very fair point, but I refer Edward Mountain to a point that I made in my opening speech. I said to Mark Lancaster at the very start, before any decisions were taken on closures—Fort George was the case most in point because, as Edward Mountain will know, the Scottish Government has a fundamental interest in it—that, if there were concerns about the fitness and suitability of any of the bases, we should work

together and see what we could try to achieve. However, that has never been done. As Christine Grahame pointed out, the Conservative amendment talks about continuing engagement with the Scottish Government, but there has been no engagement with it.

We will have to help local authorities to pick up the educational and employment consequences. We should have tried to work together on the issue; instead, we have been totally excluded from that.

Of course not all the bases are fit for purpose. Edward Mountain asked me about that. I will ask him a question. Does he think that Glencorse barracks falls into the category of not being fit for purpose and not suitable as a Ministry of Defence facility?

Edward Mountain: I am sure that the minister listened to what I said earlier in my speech. I do not know my way around Glencorse barracks as well as Christine Grahame does, and I have to take on advisement what she said. I asked the minister a specific question and it is unfair for him to throw it back at me. I will repeat it. Is there one barracks in all the barracks that are earmarked for closure that the SNP thinks is not suitable for soldiers in the 21st century? Will the minister answer that question, please?

Keith Brown: I have just answered the question. Surely the UK Government can make a case for needing to close any bases. It should talk to the Scottish Government about that and tell us the details so that we can respond. It has refused to do that, and that is why there cannot be the dialogue that there should be.

I would have thought that Edward Mountain would have known about the condition of Glencorse barracks, given his remarks in his speech. I remind him that £60 million was spent as recently as 2006, and it is now being shut.

It seems to me that the Tories south of the border have possession of the Tory spine this week, but if it were possible for some Tories to come on board and say that they will be part of the programme, I would predict that not all the base closures would go ahead. I will be held to that in future years. That is on the record, and I can be held to that. I think that not all those bases would then be closed. That is possible. I think that David Stewart made the point that, if we stand together and make the case, we can stop some of the closures, especially the more absurd ones.

That is all that the motion seeks to do, but it seems clear from the Conservative response that there is no chance that they want to be part of that. They want to slavishly follow the line that has been handed down to them from London, rather than stand up for local communities. I predict that

they will pay a heavy price for that in the local elections and the forthcoming general election, when their candidates will be unable to say, “We’ll stand up for the local communities affected by these closures.”

I see that Maurice Golden has not sought to intervene and clarify his remarks. There were murmurs of approval from the Conservatives when he commented that the Conservative position is that the SNP and I believe that all military personnel are “expendable”. That is the view, and that explodes the consensus that we have had in the Parliament for the past seven years. I will give way to Maurice Golden if he wants to try to rectify that.

Maurice Golden: That was clearly in reference to the way in which the SNP is treating the issue. I hope that Mr Brown would recognise that. How many military personnel would there be in an independent Scotland?

Keith Brown: People will look at that comment and realise that the position of the Conservative party is that it believes that there is no consensus in this Parliament of respect for the armed forces personnel of this country and that at least one party in this Parliament believes military personnel to be expendable. That is a despicable thing to have said. It is profoundly insulting to people across this chamber.

Maurice Golden has had his chance to rectify his comment and the Tories have had their chance to support the local communities that are trying to oppose those base closures. They refuse to do it. I hope that the motion will be agreed to and that the rest of us in the chamber will oppose the closures.

Standing Orders Rule Changes (Supermajorities)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-05176, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on standing order rule changes for supermajorities.

17:00

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Under the Scotland Act 2016, there will be a new supermajority requirement for legislation on certain subjects relating to Scottish Parliament elections. Those include the number of members of the Scottish Parliament, the electoral system and who can vote in Scottish Parliament elections. Any bill on those subjects will require a two-thirds majority of MSPs in order to be passed by the Parliament.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has considered how to translate those requirements into standing orders. Today, we propose some changes to the rules. Our report sets out the details of those changes. They include a new requirement for the Presiding Officer to make a statement about whether a bill requires a supermajority to be passed; a requirement for Parliament to vote on every bill after the conclusion of the stage 3 debate in order formally to record the result; and a procedure for what happens if the Supreme Court disagrees with the Presiding Officer’s decision on a supermajority question. Once the new standing orders are in place, the new powers over Scottish Parliament elections can be commenced and transferred.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 4th Report, 2017 (Session 5), *Scotland Act 2016—Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 115), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from the day on which section 11 of the Scotland Act 2016 comes into force.

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motion

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-05250, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 25 April 2017—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Air Departure Tax (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Financial Resolution: Air Departure Tax (Scotland) Bill

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Criminal Finances Bill – UK Legislation

(b) Thursday 27 April 2017—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Limitation (Childhood Abuse) (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Financial Resolution: Limitation (Childhood Abuse) (Scotland) Bill—[Joe FitzPatrick]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move en bloc motions S5M-05193 and S5M-05194, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Transport and Works (Scotland) Act 2007 (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.—[Joe Fitzpatrick]

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-05185.3, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, which seeks to amend motion S5M-05185, in the name of Keith Brown, on defence basing reforms, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Against

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

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 80, Abstentions 0.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-05185.1, in the name of

David Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S5M-05185, in the name of Keith Brown, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 36, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-05185, in the name of Keith Brown, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 37, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament expresses concern about the impact on Scotland of the military base closures announced by the Ministry of Defence as part of its Estate Optimisation Strategy; supports local community opposition to closures; calls on the UK Government to engage fully with the Scottish Government, local authorities and local communities as a matter of urgency; further notes the crucial economic and social contribution of military bases in Scotland, and calls on the UK Government to halt all and any base closures until it has prepared and consulted on full economic assessment and employment diversification plans.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-05176, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on supermajorities, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 4th Report, 2017 (Session 5), *Scotland Act 2016 - Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 115), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made

with effect from the day on which section 11 of the Scotland Act 2016 comes into force.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-05193, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-05194, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Transport and Works (Scotland) Act 2007 (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

Points of Order

17:06

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I want to raise a point of order under rule 7.3, on respect to other members. Under the circumstances, I will not name the member who has caused me to do this, because the member has already made fulsome and proper apology. However, I want to make clear for the record and for future reference for members that, if a member is to accuse another member of being absent, they should properly have made inquiries as to the reason why that person is absent, so that they do not infringe rule 7.3.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I think that the point was noted during the debate by the member concerned, but I thank Mr Stevenson for raising that point.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I also wish to raise a point of order under rule 7.3. Today at First Minister's question time, Ruth Davidson said in relation to the 0.7 per cent aid commitment:

"Theresa May herself gave the commitment to the aid budget when she was at the Department for International Development's East Kilbride headquarters, which administers aid all around the world."—[*Official Report*, 20 April 2017; c 10.]

However, the speech that the Prime Minister gave that day gives no such commitment, so why did Ruth Davidson mislead Parliament? Will the United Kingdom Tory manifesto commit to 0.7 per cent, as Ruth Davidson seems to be claiming, or will she now take the opportunity to correct the record?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Ms Haughey for raising that point of order. It is important that all members treat each other with courtesy and respect. In this case, Ms Haughey is asking me to intervene in a matter that will be settled during the general election debate. I encourage Ms Haughey and Ms Davidson to resolve the matter in the general election debate and not in the parliamentary chamber if possible.

Meeting closed at 17:09.

Correction

Maree Todd has identified an error in her contribution and provided the following correction.

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

At col 72, paragraph 6—

Original text—

Before the announcement was made, Drew Hendry MP, in whose constituency Fort George lies—I assure members that he is another Highland MP with a very safe seat—organised a meeting at which Margaret Davidson, the leader of Highland Council, and I met with Sir Michael Fallon at the Ministry of Defence to outline the impact that the loss of the barracks would have on the local economy.

Corrected text—

Before the announcement was made, Drew Hendry MP, in whose constituency Fort George lies—I assure members that he is another Highland MP with a very safe seat—organised a meeting at which Margaret Davidson, the leader of Highland Council, and I met with Mark Lancaster at the Ministry of Defence to outline the impact that the loss of the barracks would have on the local economy.

At col 73, paragraph 6—

Original text—

That is yet another example of the Highland people's voices being ignored by Westminster. I told Sir Michael Fallon exactly that when I met him in London.

Corrected text—

That is yet another example of the Highland people's voices being ignored by Westminster. I told Mark Lancaster exactly that when I met him in London.

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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