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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 8 March 2018

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

General Question Time

Licensing Boards (Role in Tackling Alcohol Issues)

1. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what importance it places on the role of local authority licensing boards in tackling alcohol issues. (S5O-01844)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): Licensing boards have a key role to play in regulating access to and availability of alcohol from both on and off-sales, and by extension in helping to tackle alcohol misuse, reduce crime and preserve public order.

The Scottish Government is responsible for the overarching legislation in relation to liquor licensing, but responsibility for procedures and individual decisions lies with local licensing boards, which are made up of locally elected councillors. All licensing boards have wide discretion to determine appropriate licensing arrangements according to local needs and circumstances and their own legal advice.

David Torrance: Local licensing boards now have more concise and targeted data recording alcohol-related incidents, medical admissions and illnesses available to them than ever before. Does the minister consider that local authority licensing boards would benefit from additional powers in order to focus and target resources effectively to combat the alcohol-related issues that are being experienced in their areas?

Annabelle Ewing: Licensing boards already have extensive powers available to them to help build their own policies for regulating the sale of alcohol to the public in their area. A licensing board's key strategic role is the preparation of the licensing policy statement, which includes an overprovision assessment that states whether local boards consider there to be overprovision of licensed premises in any locality in their area.

There has been a significant amount of legislation on the alcohol licensing regime over recent years. There would therefore need to be a strong case before any additional legislation was considered.

The Scottish Government is working with stakeholders to update the alcohol licensing regime guidance and it is expected that that will be

issued later this year. If David Torrance has any particular concerns about the operation of the licensing regime in Fife, we would be happy to meet him.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): People from areas of deprivation are eight times more likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of alcohol consumption than those from affluent communities. Alcohol abuse is not only a symptom of poverty but can be a driver, and it can have a damaging impact on communities across Scotland.

Will the Scottish Government examine how it can work alongside local authorities to reduce the impact of alcohol within those communities?

Annabelle Ewing: The member will be aware that the minimum unit pricing provisions are due to come into force on 1 May, and I am sure that he welcomes that. That is not the only approach that the Scottish Government is taking. We have a framework for action, which is a package of more than 40 measures to reduce alcohol-related harm in Scotland; those measures include the quantity discount ban, a ban on irresponsible promotions, the lower drink-drive limit, improving education on substance misuse and our nationwide alcohol brief intervention programme.

It may be of interest to the member that, while we continue to work with all relevant stakeholders, in addition a refresh of the alcohol strategy is to be introduced shortly.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Alcohol Focus Scotland reported that a number of licensing boards have difficulties in assessing and determining overprovision. The difficulties appear to centre round two interlinked issues: the relationship between outlet density and alcohol problems, and the standard of evidence that is required for a licensing board to find that an area is overprovided. What steps will the minister take to ensure that licensing boards have clear guidance to assist them in their decision making, which in turn will help to tackle the issue of overprovision?

Annabelle Ewing: As Mary Fee will be aware, local licensing boards operate independently. At the same time, as I said in my answer to David Torrance, we have been working with stakeholders to update the liquor licensing regime guidance. That is expected to be issued later this year.

If the member has specific concerns, which she may have been getting at, with regard to the criteria for determining overprovision, we would be happy to look at them if she takes them up with us directly.

2 Sisters Food Group (Cambuslang Factory)

2. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its engagement with the 2 Sisters Food Group regarding the company's consultation on closing its factory in Cambuslang. (S5O-01845)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): In the period since I responded to Clare Haughey's question on 22 February, the Scottish Government has continued to engage with the company, exploring options to support the business and workforce. Scottish Enterprise is meeting 2 Sisters Food Group again this morning to progress those discussions. The meeting was arranged for 1 March, but had to be rearranged because of the impact of last week's severe weather.

I understand that the partnership action for continuous employment meeting, which was due to take place on 5 March, was cancelled by the company. Our local PACE team is standing ready to discuss how best to support employees and is waiting to hear further from the company.

I want to reassure Clare Haughey and the workforce and wider community that we will do all that we can to save the site and mitigate the impact on the workforce and local economy. As communicated to Ms Haughey, I have written to the company to offer our assistance to retain activity in Cambuslang.

Clare Haughey: I thank the minister for his assistance with the matter thus far. As he recalled, I asked a question of him two weeks ago, and I have been working with relevant stakeholders to ensure the long-term viability of the site and to support the 450 jobs at the plant. 2 Sisters Food Group is a major source of employment in my constituency, with generations of the same family working on the site, so the effect of any closure would be devastating locally.

I am certain that my constituents and all those who are affected by the potential closure are reassured that the Scottish Government is doing all that it can to keep the factory open. Can the minister expand on the agencies that are involved in the process and list the range of activities that they have undertaken in their attempt to find a positive resolution for the workers and the wider community?

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank Clare Haughey for her interest in this issue. I certainly appreciate her point about the severity of the potential impact on her local community if the company were to close its plant. Scottish Enterprise and PACE, which is a multi-agency partnership, are the key agencies. Scottish Enterprise is meeting the company again today, as I said, and PACE is in contact with the company. We are also working with the trade

unions, and the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown, met the Unite union and a company union representative on 22 February to explore viable options to avoid the potential closure. We are committed to working with the unions and all other stakeholders to provide every support possible and to ensure a productive future for the 2 Sisters Food Group site and workforce in Cambuslang.

We are looking specifically at food processing, marketing and capital grants to help with the capital issues, as well as at training, research and development support, and support from the Scottish manufacturing advisory service and Skills Development Scotland. Those are all active areas in which we are trying to support retention of the factory. We have a good track record of working with the company to secure investment in its Coupar Angus site, which gives us confidence that we can work in partnership with the company.

Vulnerable Patients (Safety)

3. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it takes to ensure that people with a violent or threatening past do not work directly with vulnerable patients in health and social care settings. (S5O-01846)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): NHS Scotland boards routinely undertake checks of conviction-related information as part of the appointment process, in accordance with the "Safer Pre and Post Employment Checks in NHSScotland: PIN Policy", drawn up by the national partnership information network.

For regulated work with children or vulnerable adults, all applicants are required by law to become members of the protecting vulnerable groups scheme. For other posts, applicants are usually subject to a disclosure check undertaken by Disclosure Scotland. All national health service boards are required to review every post to determine the type of disclosure check that is applicable. Additionally, disclosure checks are undertaken where individuals are volunteering or undertaking work experience in NHS Scotland boards.

Anas Sarwar: I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed response. A very concerning case has been raised with me by a constituent whose brother has a profound form of Down's syndrome and resides in an NHS care facility. He suffered serious injuries due to physical abuse by an employee. The individual concerned was dismissed, and was also found to have a conviction for abusive and threatening behaviour. The family now understands that the individual concerned is back working in an NHS facility with vulnerable patients. Will the cabinet secretary agree to review the procedures that are in place,

to ensure that staff working with vulnerable patients are fit and proper persons?

Shona Robison: As I said in my initial answer to Anas Sarwar, we have robust national policies in place that clearly set out health board responsibilities in relation to disclosure checks. Those policies include explicit guidance on how health boards should investigate alleged incidents of abusive conduct in the workplace.

Anas Sarwar may recall that I corresponded with his office directly in respect of the case to which he refers, but it would be inappropriate to comment directly on the handling of an investigation into an individual NHS employee's conduct, which is obviously a contractual matter between the health board and the employee concerned. Nevertheless, in respect of the particular case to which Anas Sarwar refers, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has provided assurances that relevant pre and post-employment checking has been undertaken and that effective risk management and safeguarding processes are in place.

We always keep procedures under review and I stress, as I said in my initial answer, that they are robust and provide protection in a very robust way. However, if Anas Sarwar wants to write to me with any further information on the matter, I would be happy to receive it.

Waiting Times (NHS Grampian)

4. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the action that it is taking to tackle waiting times issues in NHS Grampian and their impact on other national health service boards with which it holds service-level agreements. (S5O-01847)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): NHS Grampian is using the £4.9 million from the £50 million that we made available to boards in the current financial year to address long waits across the whole patient pathway, including cancer pathways and specialties such as orthopaedics and ophthalmology. No matter which board of residence a patient comes from, NHS Grampian will treat patients based on their clinical need.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Although there have been some welcome improvements in referral to treatment times, it is still three and a half years since NHS Grampian met national standards and improvements have been in line with the national average, while Grampian continues to lag behind and remains, by some distance, the worst-performing health board in Scotland in that regard. The cabinet secretary has spoken in the past about the work that has been done to deal with

waiting times. For example, she told me in September that a service-level agreement was secured with Newcastle for cardiac patients, but the board's chief executive told me recently that that agreement was never finalised. How can my constituents in Moray and in Orkney and Shetland have confidence that the cabinet secretary is really on top of what is going on on the ground? Can she tell me when she expects waiting times in Grampian to meet national standards?

Shona Robison: We continue to work with NHS Grampian and other boards to ensure that patients are treated in a timely manner. We have spent a great deal of time and resource supporting NHS Grampian to improve its waiting times performance. As the member will be aware, we have just agreed a budget increase for health and sport of over £400 million and front-line NHS boards, including Grampian, will receive a baseline uplift of £179 million, with additional investment in reform that will help to reduce waiting times of £175 million. NHS Grampian's resource budget will be £920.6 million, an uplift of 2.1 per cent, which is the highest of any territorial NHS board.

I should also point out, of course, that as the member and his colleagues voted against the budget, they voted against that increase to NHS Grampian. Perhaps he might need to explain that to his constituents.

Raigmore Hospital (Operating Theatres)

5. **Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the reported problems at Raigmore hospital, how many operating theatres in Scotland have wooden doors and plaster walls. (S5O-01848)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I take the opportunity to thank all the staff who helped restore the theatres to full capacity as quickly and safely as possible and minimise the disruption to patients. I also recognise that staff across NHS Highland—at Caithness, Golspie and Fort William—helped treat some patients who were due to go to Raigmore.

I have received no indication from NHS Highland that wooden doors or plasterworks contributed to the incident to which Mr Mountain alludes. Health Facilities Scotland has also undertaken a review of the work that was undertaken and its view is that wooden doors and plasterworks did not contribute to the incident. Additionally, NHS Highland is undertaking a serious adverse event review in accordance with its standard procedure. If any lessons come out of either of those reviews, we will share them across NHS Scotland.

Edward Mountain: I agree that thanks should go to the staff of NHS Highland, across the Highlands, for all the extra work that they put in. Frankly, however, the cabinet secretary did not answer my question, which is: how many operating theatres still have plaster walls and wooden doors?

Construction requirements in operating theatres lag woefully behind requirements for other high-risk areas. Does the Scottish Government intend to invest in operating theatres across Scotland to replace material such as plasterboard and wooden doors with antibacterial plastic walling, to reduce the chances of infection and ease cleaning?

Shona Robison: I do not know whether Edward Mountain listened to my answer. Health Facilities Scotland has said that, in its view, wooden doors and plaster works did not contribute to the incident. I am therefore not quite sure why Edward Mountain continues to talk about wooden doors and plaster works when I have just told him that they were not the cause of the issue, according to the experts at Health Facilities Scotland. If he knows otherwise, perhaps he can give me the evidence that Health Facilities Scotland is wrong.

The Scottish Government is investing more than £30 million in upgrading the theatres and critical care at Raigmore hospital. That is a huge investment by the Scottish Government in that one hospital. I hope that Edward Mountain can find it in himself to welcome that £30 million investment, which will lead to major construction and help to ensure that the fabric of Raigmore hospital is as good as it can be, so that it can provide a first-class environment for patients to be treated in.

Poverty and Inequality Commission (Recommendations)

6. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it will give to the recommendations of the Scottish poverty and inequality commission as it develops its plan for tackling child poverty. (S5O-01849)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): I welcomed the advice of the poverty and inequality commission following my request to it in November last year. For the commission to have published such a considered piece of work in such a short time is testament to its determination and collective experience.

The advice that the commission has provided is invaluable as we prepare to publish our first child poverty delivery plan in the coming weeks. The plan will have full regard to that advice, and will make it clear how we have responded.

The commission outlines that poverty and inequality cannot be solved through any one portfolio area or policy. It highlights three key mechanisms that increase household income and reduce costs to make the biggest impact on the child poverty targets: work and earnings; social security; and reducing housing costs. The commission also highlights the importance of action to improve the quality of life for those who are living in poverty. I have been working closely with colleagues across Government to ensure an approach that delivers action across every aspect of life, including these key challenges.

Clare Adamson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in stark contrast to the ambitions of the commission, the UK Government's continuing austerity and welfare cuts are set to push more children into poverty, and that its policies on tax, the living wage and unemployment will do nothing to support households and help pull families out of poverty?

Angela Constance: First and foremost, I believe with every fibre of my being that we can and must end child poverty in Scotland. That is why we led the way with our ambitious Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

None of that lets the UK Government off the hook for its inaction or its damaging actions. Independent expert advice from the poverty and inequality commission rightly focuses on devolved powers, but it also recognises that there are factors outwith our control that make our job harder and have an impact on progress.

We know about the impact that the Tory Government's continuous assault on welfare spending is having because it is well documented. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that the benefits freeze is the single biggest driver of rising poverty. The Child Poverty Action Group has identified that 1 million more children across the UK will be pushed into poverty by 2020 because of the welfare cuts that have been made since 2013. In Scotland alone, welfare spend will reduce by £4 billion by the end of the decade, dwarfing the £3.3 billion spend that will become the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament.

The member is absolutely right that the UK Government could be doing far more to tackle what Mrs May describes as burning injustices by, for example, increasing the work allowance in universal credit and by lifting the minimum wage to that of the real living wage. The challenge for each one of us in this Parliament as we go forward is to go beyond mitigating the very worst excesses of the UK Government and to lift children in this country out of poverty.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

General Practice (Vacancies)

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

Many things divide the First Minister and me but, on this international women's day, I am sure that we can agree that we will do everything we can to ensure that the next generation of women has fewer battles to fight.

Speaking of battles, I ask the First Minister why, after a decade of Scottish National Party Government, a quarter of general practices in Scotland are missing at least one doctor. (S5F-02110)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, on a note of consensus that might not last long, I echo Ruth Davidson's comments about international women's day. Today is an opportunity for us to recognise countless women—not just those whose names we know, but those whose names we do not know—who have battled and continue to battle for change in their communities, their workplaces and across Scotland. It is an opportunity to salute them and to rededicate ourselves to continued progress for the next generation of women in Scotland and, indeed, globally.

On the question relating to general practitioners, Ruth Davidson will be aware that we are taking a range of actions on GP recruitment. They include actions to get more people into medical schools and into GP training and to encourage people into rural practices. Overall, the statistics that were published earlier this week show that the number of people in our primary care workforce is at its highest-ever level, thanks to increases in the numbers of nurses and healthcare support workers. Of course, the new GP contract will help us to ensure that the action that we are already taking is intensified in the period ahead.

Ruth Davidson: According to the First Minister's own statistics, just four years ago only one in 10 GP surgeries was missing a doctor; now, it is one in four. That is not progress. I will spell out the reason: it is because, under the SNP, GP services are in crisis.

We have known that for months. Last year, we wrote to every GP practice in Scotland asking to hear the GPs' concerns. I will read some of the responses that we got back. A GP in the Highlands declared:

"I think the Scottish Government has forgotten that Scotland extends north of Perth".

Another doctor added:

"the new Scottish GP contract is a disaster for GPs".

The GPs in a practice in Aberdeen, both of whom are set to retire in the next few years, said that they cannot find anyone to replace them.

All that is against a backdrop of demand rising, GP numbers falling and surgeries closing. The First Minister has had 10 years to sort that out. Why has she not?

The First Minister: There are a number of points there. First, Ruth Davidson wants to suggest that it is all about the SNP and I suppose that the implication is that, if only the Tories were in government, it would all be much better. I suppose that that begs the question why, where the Tories are in power in the United Kingdom, the decline in the number of GPs is double what it is in Scotland.

To go back to the issue in Scotland, I hope that Ruth Davidson did not intend to scaremonger about the new GP contract, because—looking at the issues for rural general practice in particular—under the new contract, no GP practice in Scotland will lose funding. That is not just something that the Government is saying; it is something that the British Medical Association has been at pains to stress. In fact, all the measures in the new GP contract are about making sure that we can encourage more professionals into general practice. The contract is also about ensuring that we reduce the unnecessary workload on GPs—the provisions on multidisciplinary working are particularly important in that regard—and that the GPs who have the biggest workload get additional funding to recognise that.

The recent budget that was passed in the Parliament included new resources to support primary care and general practice. If Ruth Davidson is so concerned about the issue, perhaps she would like to explain to the general public across Scotland why she and her colleagues voted against that additional funding for primary care.

Ruth Davidson: It is the same old story from the First Minister: judge me by my promises for tomorrow, not by my record today. The truth is that the SNP's mismanagement of our national health service is making the situation far worse. For example, at First Minister's question time just over a year ago, I asked the First Minister about the spiralling cost of locums—medical staff brought in at huge expense because there are not enough NHS staff to fill shifts. Last year, the First Minister was clear: health boards should minimise their use of agency staff. Using freedom of information legislation, we have looked at the cost of locum staff and seen that it has risen again, breaking the £300 million barrier for the first time. GPs are telling us that they are having to close their doors

because of poor workforce planning and, because of a lack of staff across the NHS, taxpayers are shelling out a third of £1 billion on costly locums and private agency workers, despite assurances that numbers would go down and not up. Does that sound like good planning to the First Minister?

The First Minister: Let me look at the issue of agency spending in particular. The combined medical and nursing agency costs represent around 2 per cent of the overall staffing budget. Ruth Davidson might be interested to know that that is a third less, proportionately, than the figure south of the border, where of course the Conservatives are actually in government. *[Interruption.]* I know that Ruth Davidson does not like that. Let me be clear: we set our own standards and do not judge ourselves by standards elsewhere, but when Ruth Davidson or any other member of the Opposition stands in this Parliament and says, “It would all be better if only my party was in government”, it is legitimate to look at where their party is in government. I am afraid that, unfortunately for Ruth Davidson, that does not paint a very pretty picture.

This week, statistics were published that show that under this SNP Government, the NHS workforce has increased by more than 10 per cent—that is more than 13,000 additional people working in our NHS today than there were when we took office. We will continue to invest record sums in our NHS and support the record numbers of staff working in our NHS. It is because of that that we know that something else in Scotland is at a record high: patient satisfaction.

Ruth Davidson: If the First Minister is so desperate to talk about the rest of the UK, perhaps she should explain to the chamber why, as a proportion of NHS funding, general practice gets a smaller share in Scotland than it does in any of the other home nations of the United Kingdom.

Here is the Government’s record: 160 fewer GPs; the number of vacancies trebling in the past five years; a third of GPs in post now nearing retirement; and an entire NHS propped up by expensive private agencies to fill the gaps left by poor workforce planning. This is a crisis of the First Minister’s making. The fact of the matter is that the share of funding to GPs has fallen since this SNP Government came into office; in fact it has fallen in eight out of the past 10 years. Is it any wonder that GP surgeries are in such a mess?

The First Minister: I, too, will talk about the record of this Government. There is record funding of our national health service and record numbers of people working in it—there has been a 10 per cent increase since this Government took office. Extra money is being committed to primary care and general practice; a target of 11 per cent of the overall NHS budget going to primary care. Money

is going into the NHS generally and, within that, into primary care—money that the Tories voted against in the budget. It is simply not credible for the Tories to come to this chamber and say that they think that there should be more investment in the NHS, when they voted against the investment that we are already making. Why does Ruth Davidson not look the Scottish people in the eye and try to explain that?

Child Benefit

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I offer greetings and solidarity from the Labour benches on this international women’s day.

Scottish Labour supports increasing child benefit as a way of helping with the rising cost of living and tackling the national shame of child poverty. It is a difference that this Parliament could start making with our new powers over social security. However, last week, the SNP and the Tories voted together against a Labour amendment to deliver that increase. Scottish Labour and the Scottish Greens support the policy, as do the Poverty Alliance and the Child Poverty Action Group, so why will the Scottish Government not support it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This is a really important issue. Richard Leonard and I share the aspiration and the commitment to end child poverty in Scotland.

I have looked carefully at the campaign to top up child benefit, as has Angela Constance, and I respect many of the organisations that are making the case for that. However, one of the issues is that, if we go down that road, £7 out of every £10 that we would spend on the policy would go to families who do not live in poverty. As Richard Leonard knows, I am an advocate of universal benefits but, when we are looking at topping up an already universal benefit to specifically target families in poverty, the question is whether that would be the best way to do it.

As Richard Leonard knows, we asked the new poverty and inequality commission for advice to inform the delivery plan that we will publish by the end of this month. That advice, which was published last week, raises the question whether that is, in fact, the best way to tackle child poverty. We will publish our delivery plan by the end of March, and we will make very clear in it the steps that we intend to take, including using new powers.

Nevertheless, we are determined to make sure that the money that we spend to tackle child poverty is actually used to do that. I hope that we can continue to have a constructive discussion on that in this chamber as we take forward what I

hope is our joint commitment to end child poverty in Scotland.

Richard Leonard: In the spirit of constructive debate, I point out that child benefit is usually paid directly to the mother. It gives a degree of financial independence and is more likely to be spent on the children. Labour wants to see that happen with all benefits, particularly universal credit, and we think that universal credit should be automatically split between the two partners in a relationship. Such split payments are supported by organisations such as Engender and Scottish Women's Aid. This week, an SNP MP has published a private member's bill to address that very issue in the Westminster Parliament, not just offering a choice but providing for split payments to be automatic. However, last week, SNP MSPs voted against split payments in the Social Security (Scotland) Bill. I want to see progressive change across the whole of the UK. Why is the Scottish Government currently blocking the delivery of benefit payments directly to women in Scotland?

The First Minister: As Richard Leonard knows, we have already made modifications, where we can, to how universal credit is paid. We are committed to working with women's organisations and stakeholders more generally to look at additional changes that we can perhaps make, and the proposal to split payments is certainly worthy of further consideration, although we would require to discuss that with the UK Government. It has perhaps escaped Richard Leonard's notice that we do not have full control over universal credit, so we cannot unilaterally make the changes that we want to make.

We are trying to use flexibilities around universal credit, and we are arguing against the roll-out of universal credit when it is penalising so many people. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill was passed by this Parliament, and we are committed to the delivery plan. We are also committed to using our new powers around the best start grant. Anybody looking at the range of actions that we are taking will see that there is a real commitment on the part of this Government to tackle child poverty effectively.

I really hope that, no matter all the other things that divide us, this is one issue on which we can get the support of Scottish Labour. If it wants us to go further and reform the welfare system more generally, it needs to advocate getting the powers over welfare out of the hands of Westminster and bringing them to this Parliament.

Richard Leonard: Let me be clear: the roll-out of universal credit has been a shambles, but the new powers that this Parliament has over social security give us a chance to build a fundamentally fairer society. I accept that the Scottish Government has already taken action on the

flexibility of universal credit, paying the housing element directly to landlords and paying it fortnightly rather than monthly. Those moves establish the principle and the practice that payments can be delivered in a different way in Scotland.

Let us not forget why automatic split payments need to happen. Too many women experience domestic abuse when the abuser holds the purse strings. Automatically splitting those payments is a practical step that the Parliament could take. Will the First Minister ensure that split payments are, and become, a hallmark of Scotland's first social security bill?

The First Minister: The issue is very close to my heart and is close to the hearts of Richard Leonard and his colleagues. In the interests of consensus, let me say that the very fact that we have exercised flexibility where we can—Richard Leonard recognises that—should tell everybody that we are not ideologically opposed to splitting payments. However, there are complexities that are associated with the issue—particularly with universal credit—because we have limited power while the main powers still lie with Westminster.

I recognise the rationale for split payments, which Richard Leonard has outlined. It is something that we are exploring and talking to others about, and we will continue to do so. If it is possible to split payments in a coherent way, we will commit to doing that. I say to Richard Leonard, in all sincerity, that the issues are important. I do not think that anyone on the Government benches could ever be accused of not treating the issues seriously. Let us try to work together to do that.

There is also a bigger issue here. Today is international women's day, as has been recognised. The fact that the majority of welfare powers still lie in the hands of a Tory Government at Westminster means that, on international women's day, we have in law the rape clause, which is an absolute obscenity. Let us look at using flexibility where we can, but we should also come together and say, once and for all, that we will not let Tories at Westminster run the welfare system. Let us do that for ourselves in Scotland. That would be a good way in which to celebrate international women's day.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are two constituency questions, the first of which is from Rhoda Grant.

Sewage Treatment (Gairloch)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I have been inundated with messages from constituents in Gairloch, in Wester Ross, who are incensed and anxious about a decision by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to

approve a new licence for sewage treatment. The licence is for a new ultraviolet system, which will be operational only during peak tourist and bathing seasons. That leaves the rest of the year with an inferior, downgraded system, which will allow bacteria and sewage into the sea. Does the First Minister think that it is acceptable for that to happen to some of our most beautiful coastline, or will the Government intervene to protect water quality in the area?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, let me express a great degree of sympathy with that question and the sentiment behind it. However, as Rhoda Grant will be aware, a formal process occurs in such cases. As I understand it, ministers have now received a formal request to review Scottish Water's application to SEPA. Given that fact, it would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail any further at this stage.

However, I will give some factual information. The request was received on 5 March. Ministers have 14 days from that date to determine whether the application should be given further consideration. Then, they have a further 14 days to decide whether the application should be formally called in. Although I absolutely understand why the question is being raised, I hope that members will appreciate that it would be in nobody's interest, given the formal process, for me to say any more in substance about the matter at this time.

NHS Tayside (Budget)

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday, it came to light that the director of finance at NHS Tayside has retired, after £5.3 million of national funds was carried forward into NHS Tayside's budget. Two weeks ago, NHS Tayside asked the Scottish Government for brokerage for the fifth year in a row, but this morning it is back for more. The Scottish Government has ordered a swift forensic audit, but how much worse must this financial basket case get before the First Minister meets the board of NHS Tayside to ensure that the mess does not affect patients and staff in Dundee?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As Jenny Marra is aware, the Scottish Government provides brokerage to ensure that the financial position of NHS Tayside remains stable, because our overriding priority is the protection of patient care and services, and that will remain the priority.

The specific issue that Jenny Marra raised—rightly—is about the way in which NHS Tayside has recorded certain amounts of money in its accounts, which potentially gives an inaccurate picture of its overall financial position. As soon as the situation came to light, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent

external review. That is now under way. It is being carried out by Grant Thornton and it will report back within two weeks.

When we know the outcome of that review, any further action that is required will, of course, be taken. In the meantime, we will provide additional brokerage to ensure that NHS Tayside's financial position remains stable, because that is in the overriding interest of patients.

Scottish Youth Theatre

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I echo the words of others on our commitment to international women's day. I hope that all political parties will use this afternoon's debate to recommit ourselves to progress on gender equality and justice.

I will read to the First Minister some words from a constituent of mine called Kirsty. She says:

"I went to Scottish Youth Theatre summer school when I was 14 and it completely changed my life. I made friends with some of the most wonderful people I have ever met there, I completely fell in love with Glasgow and I was inspired to eventually move here to study theatre."

Kirsty says that she has never forgotten that amazing opportunity and that she just took it for granted that the Scottish Youth Theatre would always exist and that she would be able to encourage her little niece to go to the summer school when she was old enough.

Kirsty is by no means alone and I suspect that every member of this Parliament will have constituents whose lives have been enriched and even transformed in that way. This year is being billed as the year of young people. Are we really going to let Scottish Youth Theatre close?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am glad that Patrick Harvie has raised that issue, because it gives me the opportunity to say a couple of things about it. The first—and Patrick Harvie and others will understand why this is the case—is that the decision about which organisations receive regular funding is for Creative Scotland. In law, the Scottish Government has no role in that process and is not able to intervene in it. That said, for the reasons that Patrick Harvie has outlined, the announcement by the Scottish Youth Theatre is of serious concern to many people across Scotland and, indeed, to me

I know that Creative Scotland has approved some funding to allow the organisation to continue to operate while, I hope, they work together to find alternative routes to support, and I encourage the Scottish Youth Theatre to continue those discussions. I have also asked the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs to offer to meet the Scottish Youth Theatre to see

whether there is some action that the Scottish Government could be party to that would help to secure a future for it.

Yes, we are in the year of young people, but more generally than that, arts—and culture and theatre within that—are very important to the wellbeing of our country. There will always be difficult decisions to be made on funding. I think that Creative Scotland is sometimes unfairly criticised because it has to make those decisions. We want to make sure that theatre—youth theatre, in particular—can flourish not just this year but generally in Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: Creative Scotland has indeed come in for serious criticism this year not just for its funding decisions but for the confused and damaging process that it has gone through. I accept that the Scottish Government cannot simply pick up the phone and instruct Creative Scotland on who it should or should not fund. However, I believe that the Scottish Government has a direct responsibility for a national asset such as the Scottish Youth Theatre. The people working there, who are still committed to delivering as much of the summer programme as they can, and the young people they work with deserve some good news—they deserve to have some confidence in the organisation's future.

Presiding Officer, the Scottish Youth Theatre performed here at the opening of this session of the Scottish Parliament in 2016—a performance called “Open the doors”. I think that it would be appalling if we stood by and saw its doors close this year as a result of those decisions. I ask the First Minister to make sure that the Scottish Government, whether by working with Creative Scotland or through another route, ensures that we do not see that happen, and that Scottish Youth Theatre does not have to close its doors this year.

The First Minister: I have a great deal of sympathy with what Patrick Harvie just said. The Scottish Youth Theatre does fantastic work and I think that it is the desire of all members for it to be able to continue to do so.

I have given the position in relation to the Scottish Government's inability to intervene in decisions that Creative Scotland makes about regular funding. As I understand it, the Scottish Youth Theatre was not previously in receipt of regular funding; I think that at the time when decisions were taken in the last round, my predecessor as First Minister was involved in exploring options.

We will continue to work with Creative Scotland and the Scottish Youth Theatre. I have asked Fiona Hyslop to offer to meet the parties and, although I cannot today give detail on what the

options might be, I certainly give a commitment that we will do everything we can to fully explore all options to allow young people in future to benefit from the Scottish Youth Theatre in the way that young people have done in the past.

The Presiding Officer: There are a few additional supplementary questions.

Scottish Youth Theatre

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): My question is on the same theme as Patrick Harvie's question.

The Scottish Youth Theatre has been existence for more than 40 years and is world renowned. It is currently based in my constituency, in the merchant city in Glasgow. I hear what the First Minister is saying. However, it is a big slap in the face and kick in the teeth for the Scottish Youth Theatre that, in the year of young people, that world-renowned company will close its doors in July because Creative Scotland cannot find money for it.

The First Minister said that she would speak to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs. Will she arrange a meeting between the cabinet secretary and other interested parties, including me, to ensure that that essential youth theatre company is allowed to continue?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Sandra White for raising the issue. As I said, I have asked Fiona Hyslop to offer to meet the Scottish Youth Theatre, and I hope that that meeting will take place. I am sure that Fiona Hyslop would be happy to meet Sandra White and other interested members, as well.

There is not much more that I am able to say today in addition to what I have said. I think that anyone who is not only listening to what I say but is reading between the lines can hear that I have a lot of sympathy with the sentiments that are being expressed.

There are always difficult decisions to be taken about funding. Funding for Creative Scotland and for culture and the arts increased this year in the budget that we have just passed. Many organisations will be getting regular funding that previously did not get it, and we have managed to mitigate the impact of cuts in lottery funding. Difficult decisions cannot be completely escaped, but we are determined to look at all options to protect, if we can, the work that the Scottish Youth Theatre does, and to support, as far as we can, a healthy and vibrant culture sector across Scotland.

Balfour Beatty (Kintore)

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland)

(Lab): The First Minister knows that Balfour Beatty holds many public sector contracts in Scotland—not the least of which is a contract on the Aberdeen western peripheral route. Does she share my concern about the company's plans, which were announced this morning, to close its electricity substation design office at Kintore in Aberdeenshire, at the cost of the jobs there, and to bid for all future work on Scotland's electricity network from outwith Scotland?

If the First Minister shares those concerns, will she raise them with Balfour Beatty and tell the company to drop its closure plans and, instead of making workers redundant, to sit down with staff in Kintore and plan a sustainable future for its Scottish business?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Such decisions and announcements are always of concern: this one is no different.

In direct response to Lewis Macdonald's question, I say yes—we will engage with Balfour Beatty on the matter. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work will be happy to meet or write to Lewis Macdonald after we have had the opportunity to do that.

Revenge Porn

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): The First Minister is aware of my successful campaign to make laws in this Parliament to protect victims of non-consensual sharing of intimate images—commonly known as revenge porn. Will she tell members how her Government will respond to reports this week that fewer than half of revenge porn cases are passed to prosecutors?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The impact of sharing intimate images can be hugely damaging, as we all know, and there is absolutely no place for it in our society. That is why we legislated for a specific offence of sharing, or threatening to share, intimate images without consent, which has a maximum penalty, on conviction, of five years' imprisonment. A public awareness campaign, consisting of advertising and public relations work, ran to coincide with the offence provisions coming into effect.

I am, of course—as Christina McKelvie is—concerned about the statistics that we have seen this week. Investigation of offences is for Police Scotland, and prosecution is for the Crown Office. We know that there are often particular complexities where police are investigating offences that have been committed using internet services that are hosted in foreign jurisdictions. The rate of prosecution for such offences in

Scotland is broadly similar to that in England and Wales.

However, the message that I took from the statistics this week—Christina McKelvie is absolutely right to raise them—is that, although putting laws in place is important, making sure that they can be used effectively is what matters most. I think that the statistics tell us that there is still work to be done on that important issue.

Modern Apprenticeships

4. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government is making on increasing the number of modern apprenticeships. (S5F-02124)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We are making very good progress on increasing modern apprenticeships in line with our commitment to deliver 30,000 new starts a year by 2020. Investing in skills development through apprenticeships makes a vital contribution to inclusive economic growth, and we have increased Skills Development Scotland's funding by 7 per cent for the next year.

Next year's target of 28,000 apprenticeship starts will, for the first time, include graduate apprenticeships, which provide the opportunity to study for a degree while in full-time paid employment.

This week, of course, we are celebrating Scottish apprenticeship week, which is a fantastic opportunity for apprentices and their employers across all sectors to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and the life-changing opportunities that they provide.

Gillian Martin: I thank the First Minister for that answer. There is a myth that apprenticeships are just for school leavers, but they can offer a pathway to more mature adults who, for whatever reason, find themselves getting further from the workforce. Can the First Minister give details on what is being done to make apprenticeships accessible to people later in life who might be in need of training to improve their employability, and can she also give some more detail on the graduate apprenticeship scheme?

The First Minister: Gillian Martin is absolutely correct to say that, while apprenticeships are an important option for school leavers, they also increasingly provide a diverse range of work-based learning opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds. Indeed, last year saw an increase of more than 20 per cent in the number of over-25s who started apprenticeships, and during the course of this year we have already seen the figure grow even further. Diversifying as well as expanding our apprenticeships is another vital way

of opening up access by creating new pathways into work.

The graduate apprenticeships offer the opportunity to develop high-level skills in emerging science, technology, engineering and mathematics related areas, and foundation apprenticeships are expanding the vocational options that are available in the senior phase of school.

There is a lot to be very positive about, but Gillian Martin is absolutely correct to point to the need not only to increase the numbers, but to ensure that we also have greater diversity, in all its respects.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the First Minister for her answers. I agree with her about the life-changing opportunities that apprenticeships can provide. I am sure that many colleagues across the chamber have seen that this week, as they visited apprentices across Scotland.

However, will the First Minister recognise this month's report from the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland on the particular barriers that small businesses in Scotland face in taking on apprentices? Will she consider how its recommendations could help to ensure that, in the future, small businesses get fairer access to support, and clearer information about taking on apprentices?

The First Minister: Yes, the Government will do that. The FSB has made important recommendations. We accept that often for smaller companies there are barriers that larger companies do not face or experience, so as we continue to increase and diversify the number of modern apprenticeships, it is really important that we give all companies that feel that their business would benefit from it the opportunity to take on an apprentice. That is an important part of the overall process that we are engaged in.

Internet Safety (Children)

5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government is doing to educate children regarding using the internet safely. (S5F-02118)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We all want children and young people to be aware of their rights online, to enjoy the internet, to show resilience and to take advantage of the opportunities on offer. It is the prerogative of children and young people to explore and enjoy the online world, but we have a collective responsibility to ensure that they do so safely.

Children and young people learn about safe and responsible use of different technologies as part of their broad general education under curriculum for

excellence, and we are also working with others to continue to deliver briefing sessions to support professionals, parents and carers to keep children safe, as well as working with young people to identify and develop ways for them to support themselves and their peers.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the First Minister for her response. I agree with her that everyone who is involved with young people, either professionally or simply as a parent, will have concerns about safe use of the internet by children.

This week, the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland called for three major changes to the relationship between children and the internet: digital citizenship lessons, a public ombudsman to mediate between under-18s and social media companies, and simplified terms and conditions for young people. I know that the Scottish Government published an action plan on that last year. Has the Government considered whether the action plan needs to be updated to take account of the new call for changes?

The First Minister: We will fully consider the recommendations that Murdo Fraser talked about in his question. In short, the answer to whether the action plan requires to be updated is yes, given what we are talking about. Because of the nature of the internet and digital technology, we must ensure that the actions we take keep pace with technological changes. We will continue to look at what more can be done.

The internet is a fantastic resource, and young people should feel confident about enjoying its benefits. However, we all know the risks that exist; therefore, it is important that we look carefully at the actions that need to be taken to keep children safe. I assure members that we will continue to do that.

Stop and Search (Black and Asian People)

6. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to figures that show black and Asian people in Scotland are more likely to be stopped and searched. (S5F-02133)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Last month, the advisory group on stop and search, which is chaired by John Scott QC, produced a report that evaluates the first six months of the code of practice on stop and search. I understand that, yesterday, the group issued an amendment to some of the figures in its report, which Anas Sarwar has drawn on.

However, the group's conclusions remain unchanged. The report clearly shows that the rate of searches declined across all ethnic groups and that the positive detection rate of searches increased across all ethnic groups, which

suggests that the police are focusing searches more effectively. It is vital that people in Scotland can have confidence in policing, whatever their ethnicity, and the justice secretary commissioned the evaluation so that we can understand how well stop and search is operating. A fuller evaluation will be carried out later this year, which will look at all those issues in more detail.

Anas Sarwar: I raised the issue of the original statistics in good faith, as they reflected the experiences that my constituents had raised with me. I recognise and accept that the author has since corrected an error and published an amendment to the report.

The First Minister will know from her own constituents that there is, at the very least, a perception of bias in stop and search among our diverse minority ethnic communities. A number of individuals and representative organisations, including the Muslim Council of Scotland, the Pakistan forum, the Scottish Afghan human rights foundation and Positive Action in Housing, as well as serving and retired officers, have repeated that concern in the past few days. The current stop and search statistics do not include vehicle stops, airport or port stops, or figures from the British Transport Police. As the First Minister has rightly said, building the trust and confidence of our communities is crucial. Will she commit to a review that covers all those areas and to meeting representatives of our diverse minority communities?

Finally, as members across the chamber have recognised, it is unfortunate that some senior figures have attempted to shut down the debate by accusing me of playing the race card or having a personal agenda. That attitude needs to be challenged, because this agenda is personal to me and it should be personal to anyone who believes in equality in all its forms.

The First Minister: Let me be very clear that I do not question Anas Sarwar's good faith in raising the issue of the statistics, and I do not question the good faith of anybody who is involved in the debate. It is a really important issue, which I know from my constituents, as Anas Sarwar does from his.

However, it is important—I think that Anas Sarwar recognised this in his question—that we try to deal in realities, and to put on record that the report does not show that, if someone is black or Asian, there is an increased risk of being stopped and searched. Anas Sarwar is right that there is or can be a perception of that, which I know from my constituents. As we know, tackling the perception of something is often as important as tackling the reality. We will continue to take the issue seriously, and the further evaluation that I spoke about will be helpful to us in doing that.

On the remainder of Anas Sarwar's question, he will know that all searches conducted by Police Scotland under the code of practice, including those that take place in airports, on the railways and on the roads are captured by Police Scotland and published quarterly. Information related to searches that are carried out under reserved powers is collated and reported by the United Kingdom Government, and searches that are carried out by the British Transport Police are recorded in its database and reported separately.

I certainly understand the concern that has been expressed by some in the Asian community, particularly about their experiences at airports, and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is looking at the matter further and will write to Mr Sarwar. It is important that we recognise and seek to tackle any perception that our ethnic minority communities have but it is also important that we recognise the good work that is being done in good faith by police officers the length and breadth of the country.

Scottish Police Authority

7. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the capacity of the Scottish Police Authority, and whether the organisation is fit for purpose. (S5F-02117)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Police Authority has implemented a number of changes in relation to governance and accountability since its new chair, Susan Deacon, started her appointment last December, including taking steps to ensure greater simplification, transparency and clarity around the SPA's governance and to ensure that decisions are underpinned by effective processes and enhanced professional advice. The current public appointments round, for which interviews are taking place this week, will bring in up to five new board members, enhancing the SPA's capacity to scrutinise policing and to hold Police Scotland to account. I also note that, for the first time, Audit Scotland gave an unqualified and unmodified opinion on the SPA accounts for 2016-17.

Liam McArthur: Presiding Officer,

"the recommendations set out in this report will go a long way to resolving the issues and concerns raised."

That was the last SPA chair, Andrew Flanagan, speaking nearly two years ago, after the Cabinet Secretary for Justice had asked him to conduct a review. What followed was a succession of failures leading to Mr Flanagan's resignation and the SPA's reputation being dragged through the mud again. The latest report was co-authored by the SPA's deputy chair. Does the First Minister not recognise that, instead of members of the SPA

marking their own homework, it is time that we had an independent expert-led commission that could examine the whole picture, including the roles of police bosses, Parliament, councils and the justice secretary?

The First Minister: It is for this Parliament to hold the justice secretary to account, but, on the broader issue, I think that it is important to recognise the changes that Susan Deacon has made since she came into office as the new chair of the SPA. For example, she has introduced single board meetings to discuss public and private issues while setting out how items of private business will be addressed; she has initiated an examination of board business, committee structures and the board's governance framework; she has strengthened engagement and dialogue with Parliament, including with committee conveners; she has reinstated the complaints and conduct committee, with delegated decision-making powers; and she has moved to improve the performance management of board members with a continuous and accelerated one-to-one programme of improvement. I am sure that she will also consider the comments made by the Parliament's Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee as part of that process.

The review that we are talking about now will, as Susan Deacon herself has said, help to inform the wider programme of improvement work that is being taken forward. It focuses specifically on executive support to the board and sits alongside the work that I have already mentioned that Ms Deacon has been undertaking. I hope that the member recognises the work that is being done and the determination on the part of the new chair to make sure that progress of that nature continues.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The review found that local communities, local police scrutiny conveners and local politicians were effectively shut out of inputting into policing decisions. Does the First Minister accept the review's conclusion that the Scottish National Party's structures have fundamentally undermined localism in policing?

The First Minister: Speaking as a local constituency MSP, I would have to say no. I regularly speak to local police about issues and priorities in my own constituency, and I assume that most members across the country do the same. However, it is, as we have always said, important that there is local accountability in policing and, as the member has rightly pointed out, it was one of the issues talked about in the review. The review's recommendations will complement the work that Susan Deacon has already undertaken, and I expect her, in consultation with her colleagues, to take forward

those recommendations as she considers appropriate.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Given the impending appointment of five new board members, what input has the SPA's new chair Susan Deacon had in setting in that agenda, ensuring that the job descriptions are proper and getting a fully effective board?

The First Minister: Susan Deacon has had considerable input into that and, as I said, interviews for new board members are taking place this week. In my earlier answers, I outlined some of the steps that are being taken to better support board members and to ensure good performance management of them. That should be welcomed. I have also outlined a range of other measures that Susan Deacon has taken.

There is an openness around the fact that improvements required to be made in how the SPA was doing its business. Improvements have been made and I am sure that they will continue to be made, as the new chair considers appropriate.

Green-belt Land (Woodhall and Faskine Estates)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-10476, in the name of Graham Simpson, on saving the green belt.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the efforts of campaigners fighting to save greenbelt land at Woodhall and Faskine estates in North Lanarkshire from development; considers that greenbelt and greenspaces play an important role in aiding physical and mental health; notes the view that such land should not be given up for development, and commends the Save Woodhall and Faskine group on its efforts to save what it believes is an important area for generations to come.

12:46

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank those members who signed my motion and so allowed it to be debated, and I thank all those who will take part in the debate. I also extend a warm welcome to the representatives of the save Woodhall and Faskine campaign and others who have made the trip to be in the public gallery today.

It is customary for members to disclose whether they have an interest in the subject of the debate. Here is mine: I love the green belt.

The debate comes about because of a proposal to seek planning permission to build on green-belt land between Calderbank and Carnbroe in North Lanarkshire—I accept that the minister will not be able to talk about that application. The area includes land that is owned by the daughters of the late Willie Whitelaw, which was passed to them by their father before he died. It contains beautiful woodland containing many species of tree, the ruins of the former estate house and what is left of the Monkland canal. The area is rich in history and heritage. It could and should be enhanced, and Orchard Brae, the developer, says that its plans—which have not been submitted yet—would allow for that. However, the plans would also see 2,600 houses built on green-belt land and would, in effect, join Calderbank to Carnbroe and then Airdrie.

Orchard Brae says that it would leave woodlands on the Woodhall and Faskine estates intact, but that is only because, with the help of the Woodland Trust, I managed to secure a tree preservation order, through North Lanarkshire Council, covering the entire area. Let us be honest: where fortunes can be made by the simple granting of planning permission, trees are not high

in people's thought processes, so that TPO was vital.

Green belts are more than just boundaries between rural and urban areas. Open spaces provide habitats for wildlife and are ideal places for walking and other recreational pursuits. They provide a natural ecosystem that is beneficial for water treatment and air quality, and they are important in preventing floods.

As my party's spokesman for housing and communities, I am fully aware of the pressure on the existing housing stock and of the need to build more affordable homes to meet the demand. However, that must be done in the right places, and the area that I have mentioned is not one of them.

Numerous health benefits are brought about by a walk in the countryside. Members do not need to take just my word for that. At a recent public meeting, a local general practitioner, David Walker—an appropriate surname—who serves the area around Calderbank and Carnbroe, spoke passionately about the health benefits, both physical and mental, of the green belt. Last week, he told me:

"We are in the midst of an obesity epidemic. Scottish government figures state that in 2016 65% of adults over 16 years of age were overweight and 29% were obese. These figures are increased from the previous 10 years. The benefits of exercise are many, particularly in green space."

Those are fine words. He went on to say that exercise is the first line of treatment for many conditions, particularly obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiac rehabilitation and mental health issues. The latter issues, in particular, benefit from exposure to green space. Dr Walker concluded:

"Once green space is gone from a community it is extremely difficult to recreate. We must do all we can to protect the health of future generations."

Dr Walker's is not a lone voice. *The Lancet* recently published a paper that claims that exposure to green space can help to lower mortality rates, and a joint study by the University of Glasgow and the University of St Andrews illustrated why the green belt is priceless, stating that environments that promote good health might be crucial in the fight to reduce health inequalities. In general, people living in poorer areas are more likely to be unhealthy and die earlier. However, the research found that living near parks, woodland or other open spaces helped to reduce those inequalities regardless of people's social class.

All of that is backed by the World Health Organization in "Urban green spaces and health: A review of evidence", which concludes:

“The evidence shows that urban green space has health benefits, particularly for economically deprived communities, children, pregnant women and senior citizens. It is therefore essential that all populations have adequate access to green space”.

In the chamber last week, I asked Fiona Hyslop whether she agreed that the idea of having a country park and canal heritage trail at Calderbank was worth investigating. She agreed that heritage trails can bring a social and economic uplift to the areas that they serve and asked to be kept informed of any developments. I will keep her informed.

We must do all that we can to protect our environment from being destroyed. It is up to this generation to ensure that the next generation is afforded the same chance to enjoy those urban woodlands and the physical and mental benefits that they bring to the communities that they serve.

We have an opportunity to protect Scotland's green spaces and heritage through the Planning (Scotland) Bill, which is going through the Parliament. The bill is currently silent on the environment, but members should rest assured that I will lodge an amendment or two to ensure that precious green space is protected through the planning system and that we enshrine in law protection for historic and locally important buildings. I do not want that to be left to secondary legislation. I am happy to discuss my ideas with the minister.

We need a plan-led system that ensures that, when an area is designated as green belt and a council is fulfilling its housing targets, speculative applications that ring alarm bells for communities just cannot happen.

I again thank the local campaigners for their tireless work, and I thank members from across the political divide for their support. My colleague Margaret Mitchell will speak later, but I thank, in particular, Richard Leonard for his backing right from the start of the campaign.

I hope that those who take part in the debate will offer their backing to my constituents and all others who are fighting their corner across the country to protect what we have. As Dr Walker said, when the green belt is gone, it is gone for good.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Richard Leonard. I understand that he has an important meeting to attend afterwards, so I understand why he cannot stay for the rest of the debate.

12:54

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Thank you for your forbearance, Presiding Officer. I apologise for having to leave the chamber early.

I thank Graham Simpson for securing a very timely debate that raises some profoundly important questions not just about green spaces but about where the power lies in our society.

The proposal to concrete over the green belt between Calderbank and Carnbroe in North Lanarkshire has provoked not only local but national outrage. It is clear with this proposal, as with so many others, that on one side are ranged big-money interests while on the other side are ranged local people and local communities resisting the robbery of a natural asset—an asset that is of historical importance, significant ecological value and great recreational benefit. They are joined by the democratically elected and accountable local council, whose local development plan has just recently re-asserted that this green space is green-belt land that is not for development.

The first proposal of application notice to build 3,000 houses and retail and other commercial premises, which was submitted on behalf of the developer to North Lanarkshire Council in 2016, was clearly in direct breach of the local development plan, which kept the land in the green belt. A revised proposal of application notice has now been submitted to include 1,600 private homes and 1,000 dwellings that are described as

“social, affordable and market-rent properties”.

That is what commonly happens. Developers who are seeking to maximise stakeholder profit first pitch a proposal to maximise their gains, then scale proposals back to make them appear more palatable to local councillors, who, for understandable reasons, want to see the building of council houses, houses for social rent and affordable homes.

As we have seen in other parts of Scotland, once developments of this scale and size are under way, the developers seek to squeeze more houses in, usually claiming that the market has changed since planning permission was granted. In most instances, they also seek to reduce their contribution under agreements made under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, claiming that the whole project would be jeopardised unless they are able to build more and contribute less. So, the debate is, in the end, about where the power lies.

Time and time again, we have seen the democratic decisions of local planning bodies made up of elected councillors overturned by the planning and environmental appeals division of the Scottish Government, which appoints an unelected reporter. There is something quite wrong with a system in which the decisions of locally elected councillors can be overridden by an unelected central Government-appointed official.

That is also, in the end, about where the power lies.

There is a broader lesson for local communities across Scotland: stand firm and fight, and keep fighting and pressing the Government. There is also a lesson for members of this Parliament. When we consider the Planning (Scotland) Bill, as it comes before us over the coming months, let us look at the right of appeal and let us consider equality of treatment. Let us consider what we can do in this Parliament to re-empower local government, to revitalise local democracy and to promote the ballot box over the board room—and, in so doing, redistribute the power.

It has been a privilege to speak in the debate and to work with the campaigners locally. I admire their determined fighting spirit and their enduring faith—which echoes mine—that, in the end, organised people can overcome organised money. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say gently to the public in the gallery that they are not permitted to clap those members who have spoken, although I know why they want to.

12:58

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank Graham Simpson for securing the debate. I am certain of the immense importance of our environment, and it is impossible to overstate the significance of its conservation. That is a worthy goal, but it must have its proper limits.

It is well known that Scotland's population is rising. The number of households around Scotland's four main cities is projected to rise by up to 24 per cent over the next 25 years and, on top of that, 150,000 households do not have anywhere to live and are on waiting lists. Only last Monday, Graham Simpson and I attended a meeting with North Lanarkshire Council at which he and I pressed the council about house building and its waiting lists.

There is a rising need for homes in our major cities, and waiting lists are growing, with Homes for Scotland reporting that we need at least 100,000 new houses of all tenures to meet the demand. Whether or not we want to acknowledge it, the fact remains that families cannot live without a home. We must also find a balance between looking after the environment and encouraging economic growth.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: I am sorry.

I am confused, because Mr Simpson's Tory counterparts in England constantly warn of a

housing crisis and say that something must be done to relieve the suffering. They are threatening to remove planning powers from English councils because not enough homes are being built, and where will those homes be built? On green-belt land. The Scottish Tories seem to be operating a double standard. If they agree that there is a need for more housing but wish to block any housing development on green-belt land, either they are defying their party or they simply prefer having homeless people to having selective development.

Graham Simpson: Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: No. I am sorry, but I do not have time.

The EuroPark development will not solve all the housing need issues but, if it is approved, it will add 3,000 new homes where families can put down roots and make lives for themselves. Those lives will include the 1,100 new jobs that the project will create. Furthermore, the project will generate an additional £126 million in household income for the families who will settle and work in the area and will bring much-needed relief in relation to housing supply. EuroPark will also bring £500 million of new investment to Scotland and Scottish businesses. I could go on and on.

More than 200 acres of parkland will be retained, and the investment opportunities will draw businesses to reinvest in their communities. Some people may object that, if we allow development on parts of the green belt, we will be on a slippery slope to eventually losing it altogether. That concern may be well founded but, as I said, no one in the chamber does not recognise the importance of conservation. Therefore, I say again that we must strike a balance between protecting the green belt and encouraging development.

Some may say, "Very well, but we should develop brownfield sites first." Of course, those sites should be developed and they have been. Half of the homes that were built in 2014-15 were on brownfield sites, and 199 hectares of previously used land was brought back into residential use in 2016. That objection also overlooks the fact that there simply are not enough brownfield sites on which to build all the homes that are required. The truth is that many brownfield sites are contaminated or have difficult ground conditions.

Rather than dig in our heels and cover our ears, we should have a rational discussion about how best to maintain the delicate balance between economic growth and conservation. We should be having a national discussion about the development of green-belt land in towns and cities. Tory members should stop trying to have their cake and eat it. Do they want economic upturn in Scotland or stagnation? I know what I

want—I want homes, jobs and prosperity for Scotland.

13:03

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate on saving our green-belt land, and I thank my colleague Graham Simpson for lodging the motion.

The development in question is a controversial plan to build thousands of homes and amenities over a large swathe of green-belt land. It will be built on a site of 3 square miles containing fields and woods between the M8, Carnbroe, Cairnhill and Calderbank on the outskirts of Airdrie. The area is made up of two estates: Woodhall and Faskine. My family has a long association with the latter area, as my father was born and brought up on Faskine farm, where he lived until he was a young man. He spoke with great warmth about his boyhood and the idyllic freedom that he had, roaming the countryside there along with his faithful companion, a collie named Kep.

Although it is surrounded by urban development, this area of natural beauty has remained untouched for generations. Furthermore, it is of significant historical interest. It boasts the Monklands canal, which in the 19th century was one of the busiest canals in Britain, transporting around 1.5 million tonnes of coal and iron ore a year. There are also remains of the listed Woodhall estate country house and of one of Scotland's earliest railways.

Despite that, it is countryside that is now set to be destroyed. The peace and serenity that hundreds of local people enjoy will be lost forever, as will much of the flora and fauna, and it will be replaced almost certainly by traffic congestion and pollution. We should not forget that the development threatens green-belt land in that area as well as in other areas in North Lanarkshire, including the Douglas Support estate—or Viewpark glen—which stretches from Coatbridge to Viewpark and Uddingston. It is only thanks to the Viewpark Conservation Group that that site of immense historical interest, with connections ranging from the covenanters to Winston Churchill, has not been completely consumed by developers. Furthermore, the green belt in Stepps is subject to the Gateside and Hornshill farm development, which was rejected by North Lanarkshire Council but has now been approved by the Scottish Government reporter, opening the flood gates to other developments with the result that Stepps, like other areas, is being slowly overwhelmed and consumed.

Those green-belt areas have recognised health benefits and are known to locals as their green

lung, assisting in their physical and mental wellbeing. With obesity reaching record levels, it is key to encourage exercise, not discourage it. Quite simply, the value of protecting those green-belt areas cannot be overstated. As Richard Lyle said, we need more new and affordable social housing, but brownfield sites should be developed for that. All too often developers are plundering green-belt land first as the most attractive to build on, which is simply unacceptable. Only if there is a compelling reason should green-belt areas such as the Faskine and Woodhall estates be considered for development.

I pay tribute to the save Woodhall and Faskine campaigners and, along with Graham Simpson, my MSP colleagues and councillors, I pledge my continued whole-hearted support for their campaign. I sincerely hope that the minister will recognise today that all brownfield sites must be exhausted before there is any possibility of developing our precious green belt.

13:07

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I thank Graham Simpson for bringing this member's business debate to the chamber. I am grateful for the emails that I have received from many constituents in relation to not just Woodhall and Faskine but green-belt developments across Scotland. Many of those are coming in response to the Planning (Scotland) Bill.

I am very sympathetic to the campaign that is being run by Graham Simpson's constituents, but I will restrict my remarks to some more general points around the green belt. The concept of the green belt has been around for a long time. Following the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, it provided an important means to curtail urban sprawl and ribbon development while encouraging more efficient use of the existing urban spaces. In my region of Lothian, we have the Edinburgh green belt, which is Scotland's oldest green belt and was established 61 years ago by the local authority at the time. There was no formal structure then, so each local authority had to develop its own local policies around the green belt and to incorporate what were considered to be the boundaries of the green belt. However, the Edinburgh green belt is now covered by the SESplan—the strategic development plan for Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. Of course, it is proposed that strategic development plans will be abolished.

Although I commend the concept, I do not think that green belts are, in fact, fit for purpose. A belt or a ring is a hard concept that provides a hard edge to settlements, and across Europe ideas about planning have moved on since 1947. If we visit cities and settlements in Germany in

particular, we see that best practice now is not hard edges but wedges or long fingers of greenery in the hearts of cities moving out into the countryside, so that the distinction between urban and rural and between brown and green is not so hard. That enables the maximum number of people living in settlements to experience, enjoy and benefit from green spaces. In Edinburgh, with the economic growth that is projected, there are increasing pressures on the green belt. However, I question the green belt in the Edinburgh context, because a lot of it is not green but brown and is weeds; it is land held by speculators waiting for the day when land values will increase and they can take away a profit.

We want to see legislation that strengthens the planning system and our ability to protect green spaces and the values that they provide. I am working with constituents in Edinburgh, for example, who are being served with eviction notices to move them off farm land, which we would prefer to see as a food belt. The land was part of the green belt, but is now zoned for a film studio, under pressure from the Scottish Government—another speculative development.

The current Planning (Scotland) Bill contains nothing on the green belt although, in section 10, under “Simplified development zones”, it is clear that ministers want to revoke section 54 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, which prevents simplified planning zones in approved green belts. The bill proposes that simplified development zones could be established in green-belt areas to support

“town centre investment and regeneration”.

That is in the policy memorandum, and I think that we should look at it. However, the bill contains some welcome proposals on local place plans, although they are very ill-defined.

The wider issue raised by Graham Simpson’s motion relates to how the planning system works. In too many cases across Scotland, and not only in green belts, we find developments that have been unanimously rejected by elected members of the planning authority being appealed by developers and upheld on appeal or, in many cases, we find decisions being rejected by reporters or ministers. As we have heard when taking evidence on the Planning (Scotland) Bill, that undermines the shared ambition to have a front-loaded planning system. We will therefore bring forward proposals to end the applicant’s right of appeal, to strengthen the local development plan, to eliminate the speculative volume house-building model, and to give local people and local planning authorities much greater say in how land is developed across Scotland, including in the green belts.

I thank Graham Simpson for allowing me the opportunity to air those thoughts.

13:11

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I thank Graham Simpson for bringing this important and timely debate to the chamber.

I have to offer an apology to you, Presiding Officer. I missed the start of the opening speech because I was taking a young person to meet the First Minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is perfectly all right. You sent us a note in advance, which was most appropriate.

Fulton MacGregor: Thank you for that. I just wanted to declare it.

We have heard a bit about why the green belt is important. It is important to have open space. It links with the play agenda and the healthy lifestyle agenda, and it is very good for physical and mental wellbeing. The briefing that we received from the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland mentioned a survey that was held in June last year that found that 74.6 per cent of people agreed that the green belt should have stronger protection.

I lodged a general question for this morning, and although it did not get taken because we did not quite reach question 10, I now have Kevin Stewart’s answer in written form, which can be found on the website. It says:

“Scottish Planning Policy provides strong and flexible policy for greenbelts across Scotland. The bill won’t change that policy but aims to give it greater weight in decision making.”

That assures me that the Scottish Government takes the green belt very seriously, and why would it not?

Andy Wightman: Will the member give way?

Fulton MacGregor: I want to make progress. I have a lot of local issues to talk about.

If a developer wants to build on the green belt, it must prove that there are exceptional circumstances and benefit to the community, especially when so many brownfield sites are available. That means I probably disagree with my colleague, Richard Lyle, and his comments. There are brownfield sites aplenty in North Lanarkshire.

The motion is about Faskine, which borders my constituency. This is a side issue, but in the Carnbroe area, people are also fighting a proposal for a local incinerator. I know that Monica Lennon has a debate on that next week, and I will commit to speak in that. I cannot go into much detail about

that because it is at the local government planning stage, but I have stated my overall position—people really need to demonstrate why they want to build in a green-belt area and what benefit it would bring to the community.

Given the close proximity of Carnbroe, I will watch developments that take place through the various processes. I thank the group from Woodhall and Faskine, members of which I know are here—Kathleen, Dr Glen, Diane and Peter, all of whom I met coming off the train today; I apologise if I have missed anybody. I thank them for keeping me up-to-date with what has been going on. Alex Neil, whose constituency Carnbroe is in, sends his appreciation. He is at a funeral this morning.

Although the Faskine and Woodhall area has been on my doorstep all these years, I did not know until I went on a tour of it what a fantastic area it is. I have now started to use it as one of my running routes. I am not the best runner ever, but I have started to use it.

I want to mention the Stepps area, which Margaret Mitchell mentioned. One decision was taken by the local authority not to allow development, but that decision has been overturned by the reporter and there are now two more issues at the pre-planning stage. As with Faskine, the proposal needs to go in front of the local authority first, and rightly so. However, it directly affects my constituency and, as schools and infrastructure are already struggling to cope, I have committed to support my constituents as best I can. When the plans come in—if they get to that stage—I will lodge my objection with the council if it is required and appropriate to do so. I make that commitment clear.

We need more houses. I am proud of the Government's targets and what we have done. However, we also need our green belts for our health and wellbeing. It is our job as MSPs, councillors and others to find that balance. I have every faith that the Government and the ministerial team that delivers planning will deliver just that.

13:15

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): As a fellow Central Scotland MSP, I thank Graham Simpson for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate. I say a big "Hello and welcome" to everyone who has travelled from the communities that are affected to be here.

It takes a lot of time and effort to engage in the planning process. I say that as a former town planner—I refer members to my entry in the register of interests. Graham Simpson declared his love for the green belt; I love planning. I love its contribution to place making, and not just the great

places that it has helped to shape, but the important part that it plays in protecting the natural environment that we all love and which is important both for our health and wellbeing and for future generations.

We are having the debate because there is a proposal in front of a community. One of the benefits of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 is that we now have a process in which there is early engagement and communities can get involved at the stage of the proposal of application notice. There is no planning application yet, and we cannot talk too much about the specific case because the cabinet secretary cannot get involved in the detail of it at the moment. However, it is good that the community can have its say; it has certainly done so.

We are re-examining planning legislation. We were told in 2006, and earlier, that if we front loaded the system, had early engagement and worked towards maintaining a plan-led system, we would get the right developments in the right places, that people would feel that they had a voice and had been listened to, and that we would get away from accusing local people of being nimbies who do not want development and are getting in the way of progress.

Being a Lanarkshire person, I know that we have a lot of vacant and derelict land there—we have a lot of brownfield land. In Ravenscraig, we have a big site where not an awful lot has happened. However, we have a system in Scotland that I believe is pro-development. More than 95 per cent of planning applications are approved, so we have a culture that is very much about making stuff happen, but we have to consider the viability of sites and why brownfield sites are becoming less attractive.

We know that a big constraint on development is infrastructure costs. We are considering that in our scrutiny of the Planning (Scotland) Bill. There are measures in the bill that are good and well intentioned, but if we are to be ambitious for our communities throughout Scotland, we need a transformative planning system.

I am very concerned about the lack of resources for planning. All the people in the public gallery have to pick up the phone to a planning officer. They have to ensure that they get a proper hearing, but 23 per cent of local authority planner jobs have disappeared in the past few years. That tells us that our priorities are, perhaps, not quite right.

Richard Leonard talked about where power lies. When I was 16, I went to university to study town planning; some of the debate has taken me back. We do not need to go over why we have green belt and why it is important. I was curious about

why development happens and who makes decisions; members are applying the same level of curiosity to our scrutiny of the Planning (Scotland) Bill.

Environmental justice is not just handed over to communities: it is a battle and a fight. It costs money to get professional advice and to challenge planning decisions. The system is stacked in developers' favour because they have armies of consultants and experts at their backs, but communities do not have any of that. When we have a development plan that says that such stuff should not be happening, we have to think about how level the playing field is. We are asking communities to take on big fights that are not of their making.

Fulton MacGregor: Will Monica Lennon give way?

Monica Lennon: I know that my time is up, Presiding Officer, but I am happy to take the intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you should close shortly. It is a four-minute speech.

Monica Lennon: I would have been happy to take the intervention, but I appreciate that my time is up. I thank Graham Simpson for securing the debate, and I look forward to hearing the cabinet secretary's response.

13:20

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): I have listened with great interest to the debate, and I thank all members for their contributions and for the thought and care that went into them. I, too, welcome members of the public to the gallery.

Graham Simpson acknowledged—as did Monica Lennon, who is a former planning professional—that it would be inappropriate for me, as a member of the Cabinet, to comment on the merits of a specific planning case. However, I am happy to close the debate by bringing together some thoughts on the policy issues and on opportunities in relation to green spaces, community engagement and planning.

Members have acknowledged that green infrastructure has a great deal to contribute to our quality of life, health and wellbeing. We all agree that green spaces are important to people. In the "Greenspace Use and Attitudes Survey 2017", more than 90 per cent of urban Scots surveyed said that it is important to have green space in their area. Green networks can be the lifeblood of a village, town or city; they contribute to quality of life and to health, and they provide many other

benefits, including in managing flood risk, supporting wildlife and absorbing pollution. Scotland is an environmental leader, and the importance of green space is widely recognised in our policies on health, regeneration, the early years, planning, biodiversity and climate change.

We have also supported gathering of evidence about green space, including the pioneering "Scotland's Greenspace Map". The Government has funded "The Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report", which gives the up-to-date picture of green space in Scotland. It shows that we can rightly claim to be a nation of green towns and cities, with green space comprising more than half our urban land area. That is the equivalent of a tennis-court sized publicly accessible green space for everyone who lives in urban Scotland. Through Scottish planning policy, we have set out how planning should protect and promote that wealth of green space as part of successful place making, because we know that being able to access high-quality green space can improve the health, wellbeing and confidence of people and communities.

Monica Lennon: One of the issues that the Local Government and Communities Committee has been looking at in relation to the Planning (Scotland) Bill is that the bill does not state what the purpose of planning is. We have heard from some stakeholders that it would be helpful to state that in the bill, because it would mean that everyone in the process would know the high-level vision for our country. Issues such as sustainable growth and sustainable development should be explicit in the bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is as though we are having a stage 1 debate. I gently remind members that the debate is supposed to be about saving the green belt.

Angela Constance: It is important that people understand the purpose of planning and the many objectives of planning infrastructure, planning policy and the law. The Government will have to look very carefully at what can be done to help people to understand and access the planning system. There are many misconceptions about the purpose of planning and the terminology that is used in planning. I will touch on that later.

I will go back to the benefits of green space. We have seen evidence from the World Health Organization on the benefits of green space. They include healthier birth weights, improved mental health, reduced cardiovascular mortality and obesity, and a lowered risk of type 2 diabetes. In recognition of the range of benefits that green space offers, we have added to the national performance framework a new indicator about access to local green space.

We are also supporting projects that enhance green space within communities. The central Scotland green network, which is a national development in “Ambition, Opportunity, Place—Scotland’s Third National Planning Framework”, is Europe’s largest green-space project and is home to 3.5 million people. In our programme for Government, we committed to its on-going delivery. The Scottish Government provides the Central Scotland Green Network Trust with about £950,000 a year to drive that.

As well as protecting green space, we need to plan ahead to deliver the right homes in the right places, as many members have reflected. Planning should facilitate economic investment that supports jobs, and we need to ensure that communities have access to the facilities and services that they need. We support a plan-led system to achieve that: that touches on Monica Lennon’s point about the many purposes and objectives of planning.

Green belts are a tool to guide the future development of our settlements by directing developments to the most appropriate and sustainable locations. Green-belt designations and related planning decisions are, of course, for planning authorities in the first instance. However, “Scottish Planning Policy” is clear that for most settlements, a green belt is not necessary as other policies can provide an appropriate basis for directing development.

There are strong protections in place for green belts in Scotland. Although “green belt” is a well-known planning term, there are common misconceptions about it. The green belt’s purpose is not to prohibit development altogether and it is not intended to protect natural heritage or open space: other environmental designations and policies are available for that. The green belt needs to evolve as part of the development plan. Local authorities should keep green-belt boundaries under review. Such reviews can support settlement strategies by directing development to the right location and helping to maintain the long-term integrity of the green belt.

Planning has to make the best use of the land that we have available—a point that a number of members made. It has to support development that meets our needs for homes, jobs and services. It can ensure that future development is designed with existing environmental assets in mind. New development and investment can also provide the opportunity to provide access to green space for more people by providing enhanced links.

How the balance is to be struck is a matter for local authorities in consultation with communities, rather than for Parliament, to decide. The

Government is working hard to improve the planning system and people’s trust in it.

With the Planning (Scotland) Bill we have an opportunity to create a more streamlined and confident system that makes a real and positive difference to people’s lives and their places.

We very much believe that community power is a critical part of the planning process, so it is positive that communities are working together to share their views on how their places should evolve. By supporting the bill’s provisions to create local place plans, we can do our bit to create more of that.

I appreciate that we will, as we progress with the bill, come back to a range of planning issues time and again, as Parliament goes through its appropriate processes.

I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. A wide range of matters have been covered and I am sorry that I cannot reflect on them all in the time that is available. The debate has been a good opportunity to hear members’ views. I hope that it has been worth members of the public’s while to have opportunity to hear MSPs debate some of the intricacies around planning a little bit and—which is more important—the benefits of green space.

13:28

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

Crèche

1. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what information it collects on the use of the Parliament crèche, and whether there has been any analysis of its use. (S5O-01874)

Kezia Dugdale (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): Here I am! I have spent long enough trying to get this seat, and here I am, responding on behalf of the corporate body. I thank Mary Fee for her question, and for the fact that she has raised it on international women's day. I wish all the women in the chamber well with their cause.

The Scottish Parliament crèche is considered to be an important part of our vision as a Parliament to be open and accessible, and it is primarily there to provide childcare for visitors to the building. The crèche is, however, also available to members and staff as ad hoc childcare.

We closely monitor the crèche's use, and collect information, including the time when the child arrives and leaves and the nature of the parent's visit to Parliament—whether the parent was here to give evidence to a committee, to visit chamber business or for some other type of activity. We also collect information on the age of the child—whether they are under or over the age of two.

The information that we collect is reviewed regularly and the average length of stay is identified, along with all the reasons why people use the crèche, so that we can understand that. I hope that that answer is helpful.

Mary Fee: I thank Kezia Dugdale for that very helpful and full answer. Given the growing pressure on working families, the rising cost of childcare and the size of the Parliament's staff, what consideration has the Parliament given to expanding the crèche service into a nursery that could serve both the needs of visitors to the Parliament and the childcare challenges that its members and staff face?

Kezia Dugdale: The Parliament is alive to its responsibilities to be a decent employer operating a flexible working environment, particularly around the issues of gender equality that are so much in our minds today. The issue has been looked at on a number of occasions by previous corporate body memberships, who have always agreed that the crèche is primarily a facility for visitors to the

Parliament. That said, the crèche is managed in such a way that it can be used by members and their staff on an ad hoc basis, in an appropriate manner; they pay, of course, while visitors to the Parliament do not.

We have looked in the past at what it would take to have a nursery facility on the site and I am sure that Mary Fee is more than well aware that that would require different ratios of staff to children and some physical changes to the building, because of the requirements to have outdoor space for the running of a nursery. There would also have to be an increased level of structured learning and development. That is the main difference between nursery provision and a crèche, which is primarily a childcare facility. We are constantly looking at those issues.

I will end by saying that the majority of the people who use the crèche are visitors—they are about 85 per cent of the users, while 15 per cent of the people currently accessing the crèche are members and their staff. We are alive to the issues and we will continue to monitor the use of the crèche closely.

Sanitary Products

2. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it plans to make sanitary products freely available in the Parliament for staff and visitors. (S5O-01875)

Kezia Dugdale (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I commend Monica Lennon for her work in this area and recognise that today is the day that she has published the results of the first stage of her consultation on the issue.

The Parliament is committed to providing a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone has the right to be treated with respect and dignity, including women who are experiencing menstruation or the menopause in the workplace and beyond. We are aware of the excellent work already being carried out by the Parliament's women's network. They recently launched an initiative providing honesty boxes stocked with free sanitary products in the Parliament's toilets. Those have proven to be very popular, as Monica Lennon will be aware. That initiative relies on the good will of staff and other users of the building to replace the products.

While the SPCB recognises the success of that initiative, the women's network is now making recommendations to the Parliament's diversity and inclusion board about the future provision of that service. The SPCB is waiting to see the outcome of that process before it revisits the matter and takes any further decisions about the project's future.

Monica Lennon: I thank Kezia Dugdale for her response. Period poverty and access to sanitary products have been raised many times in this Parliament. As Kezia Dugdale said, today I lodged my proposal for a bill to establish a legal right to access sanitary products for everyone in Scotland.

The Scottish Parliament women's network has done an excellent job of improving access to sanitary products for parliamentary staff, with the launch of the honesty box scheme last year.

The corporate body has responded well to other public campaigns, such as the recent campaign on reducing the use of plastic straws. Does the member agree that the corporate body has an obligation to demonstrate leadership on access to sanitary products? Will the corporate body welcome the honesty box scheme and advise whether work has been carried out to cost the provision of sanitary products, so that the Parliament can meet the needs of staff who menstruate or experience the menopause?

Kezia Dugdale: It is fair to say that we are examining the issue closely and considering what might happen next. However, we do not want to pre-empt any recommendations that the women's network might make.

We have looked at the cost. The initial cost of establishing the boxes around the building was £550, and we have worked out that the annual cost of the service would be about £2,400. Such costs are well within what is feasible in extending the approach so that the Parliament is the main provider of the service. However, we will take the decision when we have done more work and consultation with the women's network. I am sure that the member respects that as the right and proper way to go about it.

Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme (Investment Strategy and Principles)

3. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what discussions it has had with the fund trustees regarding updating the Scottish parliamentary pension scheme's investment strategy and statement of investment principles, and how it will ensure that the scheme's members are consulted about this. (S5O-01876)

Sandra White (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I thank John Finnie for his question and note his tenacity on the subject.

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body discussed engaging with the fund trustees about the scheme's investment strategy at its most recent meeting, on 22 February. It was agreed that a series of meetings involving the SPCB and the fund trustees should be arranged, commencing in

March, to discuss and exchange views on the scheme's investment strategy.

It is standard practice for the fund trustees to review the scheme's statement of investment principles at least every three years and to update the SPCB on a revised statement. Under schedule 1, part B, rule 5 of the Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Act 2009, the fund trustees are responsible for the governance, management and administration of the scheme, and for the management of the scheme's assets, including decisions about setting the scheme's investment strategy.

John Finnie: I thank the member for her detailed response. A number of people have a long-standing interest in the issue, and it is important to say that we are in charge of the strategy, not the people whom we engage to operate the fund, although that impression has sometimes been given in the past.

I wonder whether the member is aware of research, which I am happy to share, that shows that 72 per cent of people think that our MSP pension fund should not be able to invest in companies that are involved in arms manufacture, fossil fuel extraction and tobacco.

Indeed, in December the UK Government said:

"government supports the ... view that trustees should consider members' ethical and other concerns, and may respond by acting on them where they have good reason to think members share the concern and it does not involve a risk of significant financial detriment."

The best way for trustees to know what fund members' ethical concerns are would be to consult them. That would involve consultation only with current and previous MSPs—not a massive group of people or a massive expense. Given that the pension fund's investment strategy and statement of investment principles are under three-yearly active review, as the member said, will the SPCB write to pension trustees in support of a consultation on potential divestment from arms manufacture, fossil fuel extraction and tobacco?

Sandra White: We will certainly be happy to look at work that has been done.

As I said, the SPCB will be meeting the fund trustees. I am sure that the consultation that John Finnie proposes will be part and parcel of our discussions.

Mr Finnie will be aware that the trustees are representatives of all the political parties, including his. It is not for me to suggest who he might want to speak to, but perhaps he—and any other member who feels as strongly as he does—could speak to the member of their party who is represented on the board of trustees.

I will be happy to take forward suggestions and requests for further information from the member.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We have a supplementary question from Jamie Halcro Johnston.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body seek clarity from the fund trustees that the existing investment strategy is consistent with market standards?

Sandra White: I thank the member for that question. I know that he has an interest in the area, and in the council area also. Certainly, we can take that forward at the next meeting of the SPCB, along with the trustees as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. I will allow a couple of moments for members to change seats.

International Women's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Is everyone sitting comfortably? Then we will begin. [*Laughter.*]

The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-10851, in the name of Angela Constance, on international women's day.

14:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): Today is international women's day: a global day to celebrate women's achievements and to call for accelerated action towards gender parity. This year's theme is press for progress.

Presiding Officer, 2018 is historically significant. A hundred years ago, some women got the right to vote and the right to stand for election to Parliament. It is also Scotland's year of young people: a year when we celebrate young people's achievements and contributions and create new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and globally.

On international women's day in this, Scotland's year of young people, I want to talk about equality from the perspective of young women and girls. What does it feel like, a century since some women got the vote, to be a girl growing up in Scotland today?

I also want to pay tribute to the young women activists who are taking change into their own hands. They are speaking out against sexual harassment, fighting for equal rights and opportunities, challenging societal norms and saying unequivocally that they want equality for women and girls, and that they want it not in another 100 years' time, but now.

On Tuesday, alongside the First Minister, the Minister for Childcare and Early Years and the rest of the Cabinet, I was really delighted to meet 14 children and young people from the Children's Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament, who ranged in age from nine to their early 20s. The second such Cabinet meeting, it was an opportunity for our children and young people to raise directly with the Scottish Government issues that matter to them and a chance for us to really listen, discuss and collectively agree what we can do about them. Equality was right up there as one of the topics that children wanted to raise.

We know that some aspects of the women's inequality that we talk about, such as the gender pay gap, have their roots in the early years. The types of toys and clothes that are marketed at girls and boys—when something as simple as a colour becomes identified with a gender—the fact

that children's clothes aisles are divided into princesses and heroes, and the character traits that are considered appropriate for each gender can carry through to subject choice at school and to career choices.

Every year, the charity Girlguiding UK does a survey of girls' attitudes, which is a snapshot of what girls and young women think on a wide range of issues and an insight into the pressures that young women and girls today face. The impact of gender stereotypes is clear. Fifty-six per cent of 7 to 10-year-old girls who were surveyed thought that boys were better at understanding difficult things, and 52 per cent thought that girls were better at doing their chores at home. In the week that the survey was carried out, 47 per cent of girls aged 11 to 21 had seen stereotypical images of men and women in the media that made them feel less confident. Thirty-seven per cent of girls saw gender stereotypes used on social media every day. However, 84 per cent of girls aged 11 to 21 said that they expected equal opportunities with men in the future and thought that childcare should be shared equally between parents, so there is a strong sense that young women and girls will not accept gender inequality as inevitable.

Last year, the #MeToo movement erupted in the aftermath of allegations about the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. The hashtag has been used literally millions of times on Twitter by women of all ages, and by men, to share their own experiences of sexual harassment.

The origins of the #MeToo movement go back to 1996 when activist Tarana Burke, who is now a director of the Brooklyn-based organisation Girls for Gender Equity, was a youth camp director. A young girl confided in her about the sexual abuse that she was experiencing and Tarana said that, at that time, she did not feel equipped to help. Describing the experience of her interaction with the young woman, she said:

"I couldn't help her release her shame, or impress upon her that nothing that happened to her was her fault. I could not find the strength to say out loud the words that were ringing in my head over and over again as she tried to tell me what she had endured. I watched her walk away from me as she tried to recapture her secrets and tuck them back into their hiding place. I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone and I couldn't even bring myself to whisper, 'Me, too'."

As a result of the young girl's story, Tarana went on to start the #MeToo movement and to help young women of colour who had survived sexual abuse, assault and exploitation. It is an emotive and powerful story—that is how change is made. It brings to mind the well-known quotation by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who said:

"A small group of thoughtful ... people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

In 2005, seven young friends from Drumchapel high school in Glasgow started another movement, of which you will be well aware, Presiding Officer. One of their number, 15-year-old Agnesa Murselaj, was dawn raided and detained with her family by United Kingdom immigration authorities. Agnesa and her family had been settled in Scotland for five years; they were seeking asylum, having fled from Kosovo where their Roma ethnicity put their lives in danger.

Agnesa's friends, some of whom were also seeking asylum, were concerned by her sudden disappearance and decided to do something. They set up the Glasgow girls group and started campaigning against Agnesa's deportation and for an end to dawn raids on families with children. They started a petition, held candlelit vigils to prevent other families from being raided and secured cross-party support from this Parliament. With the support of charities and community groups, they kept the issue firmly on the political agenda until, ultimately, the UK Government announced an end to the detention of children for immigration purposes in 2010.

In September 2008, the Murselaj family were granted indefinite leave to remain, and the story of the Glasgow girls—Amal Azzudin, Roza Salih, Agnesa Murselaj, Ewelina Siwak, Toni-Lee Henderson, Jennifer McCarron and Emma Clifford—has inspired TV documentaries, dramas and even a musical.

There are many more such stories, testimonies and experiences. In 2015, the girls against campaign was founded by a group of teenage girls in Scotland who were just fed up at being sexually harassed and assaulted at gigs and live music venues. They now have thousands of supporters and work with bands, festivals and venues across the country.

In Kenya, five teenage girls from Kisumu girls high school have created an app that connects girls affected by female genital mutilation to legal and medical assistance. It also has a panic button for girls to alert the authorities.

Malala Yousafzai needs no introduction: she is a young woman from Pakistan who campaigns for girls' right to an education and is, of course, the youngest Nobel prize laureate.

In England, Amika George, an A-level student, has started the #FreePeriods campaign for every student receiving free school meals to receive free sanitary products. More than 80,000 people have added their name to Amika's petition. I am pleased that, in Scotland, we have already committed to fighting period poverty by providing access to sanitary products for students in schools, colleges and universities, and we have recently decided to continue to provide sanitary products to more than

1,000 women who participated in our Aberdeen pilot project while we evaluate the project's outcomes.

I could go on, but the point is that young women and girls in Scotland, across the UK and around the world are speaking out against social injustice and inequality, just like the suffragettes 100 years before them.

I also note that today, another Scottish woman—Mary Barbour—is being honoured for, among other things, her pivotal role in leading the revolt against rent increases in Glasgow during the first world war. In 1915, with men at the front line, an influx of workers to Glasgow's shipyards and munitions factories resulted in overcrowded tenements, and landlords, taking advantage of the situation, hiked rents up by as much as 23 per cent. By November that year, as many as 20,000 tenants were on rent strike. In his 1936 book, "Revolt on the Clyde", the socialist leader Willie Gallacher remembers them as "Mrs Barbour's Army". He wrote:

"In Govan, Mrs Barbour, a typical working-class housewife, became the leader of a movement such as had never been seen before, or since for that matter. Street meetings, back-court meetings, drums, bells, trumpets—every method was used to bring the women out."

Within a month, the Minister for Munitions, David Lloyd George, changed the law to reduce rents to pre-war levels across the country. Today, a bronze statue of Mary and her army, by sculptor Andrew Brown, is being unveiled at Govan Cross in Glasgow.

The methods may have changed, with social media perhaps replacing back-court meetings, but just like Mary Barbour, young women are standing up for what they believe is right, and we need to support, encourage and, above all, listen to what they are telling us. One of the findings from the Girlguiding survey that I mentioned was that 57 per cent of the 11 to 21-year-old girls surveyed did not think that politicians understood the issues that they face today. That is simply not good enough, and we should all respond to that loudly and clearly.

Indeed, that is why, among other things, meetings such as the one that the Cabinet had on Tuesday with children and young people are so important. The First Minister's national advisory council on women and girls deliberately has three young women members—15-year-old Amina Ahmed, 17-year-old Katie Horsburgh and 21-year-old Suki Wan. The council's second meeting also took place on Tuesday and focused on attitudes and culture change.

It is in all our interests to keep pressing for progress towards gender parity, because equality for women and girls is good for all of us, good for

our economy and good for our society. That does not mean that achieving gender equality is easy; it is not, but every step forward and every step that takes us closer to that goal is a step worth taking.

I am proud of the steps that the Scottish Government is taking. Already this year, we have passed legislation on domestic abuse and women's representation on public boards. Our science, technology, engineering and mathematics—or STEM—strategy is prioritising challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging girls to get excited about STEM and the rewards of a career in STEM sectors.

On Tuesday, Skills Development Scotland organised an event in Glasgow that was targeted at young people from underrepresented groups who are interested in finding out more about modern apprenticeships, including young women considering STEM careers, and care-experienced, black and minority ethnic and disabled young people.

The equally safe strategy—our strategy to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls—sets out our commitment to piloting a whole-school approach to tackling gender-based violence, in partnership with Zero Tolerance, Rape Crisis Scotland and Education Scotland. The school years are formative ones for young people, and we want to ensure that we are helping them to develop a good understanding of what healthy relationships are and of consent. However, we can—and must—always do more.

Today, the First Minister announced that she will once again run the first mentor initiative, offering another young woman the chance to be mentored by her for a year. She has called on other women to join her, by offering a little bit of their time to and sharing their experience with another woman or girl to help them reach their goals and fulfil their potential. Later this year, in recognition of the centenary of women's suffrage, the Scottish Government will hold an event with young women to talk about what we can do to get more women into political office.

Much has changed over the course of a century—much of it for the better in terms of women's rights and equality. However, we need to be vigilant in terms of the good progress that has been made, and we need to keep taking those steps forward. We can and we should all play a part in pressing for progress, and we must never for a minute take our foot off the pedal.

I move,

That the Parliament unites on International Women's Day to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls, which are fundamental human rights; welcomes Scotland's Year of Young People 2018, which aims to inspire Scotland through its young people,

celebrating their achievements, valuing their contribution to communities and creating new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and globally; further welcomes the opportunity to reflect on young women and girls' experience of gender inequality and what they would like to see change in the future; notes the Scottish Government's commitment and ongoing activity to tackle gender inequality; pays tribute to the many and valued contributions of young women and girls, in Scotland, across the UK and around the world, who are advocating for, and in some cases making, change towards gender parity in their communities, and acknowledges organisations, such as Girl guiding Scotland, Young Scot and YWCA Scotland – the Young Women's Movement, which play a vital role in ensuring that the voices of young women and girls are heard and acted on.

14:41

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I am grateful to Angela Constance for leading this debate, which is being held on international women's day—a worldwide event that is aimed at celebrating women's achievements and inspiring people across the world to continue the fight for gender equality. The campaign, which began with a women's march in New York in 1909, is an opportunity for Governments and women's organisations to come together and to reaffirm our priorities with regard to achieving true gender parity.

Following the events of the past year, in which women's rights have dominated the news in the wake of a global reckoning on sexual misconduct, it is more important than ever that we avoid complacency and, in the spirit of this year's theme, continue to press for progress. That is why I will support the Scottish Government's motion today as we seek to protect and promote the rights of women and girls across the world.

Tying in with last month's centenary of women's right to vote, we have much to celebrate in the way of progress. I look at the women and girls of today and see that the choices that are open to them are far greater than the ones that I had. I remember having my careers talk at school and saying that I wanted to join the army or the police. Although the reason that I was steered away from that idea was more my height than my gender, the alternatives that were presented to me at that time were either administrative or secretarial roles. When I was at secondary school, I attended a night class in computer programming—something that was new and exciting to me—but at no point did any of my teachers suggest that that might be a route into a career.

Fast forward 20 years and I am greatly pleased to see the emphasis that is now placed on improving female uptake of STEM subjects. In my region, Glasgow, we are lucky enough to have a number of initiatives that seek to promote gender equality in that area. For example, Glasgow

Caledonian University has worked with SmartSTEMs to host workshops for school pupils in areas such as coding, aviation and digital modelling. Nationally, we have seen the likes of tech she can—that charter, led by PWC, is a national commitment by organisations to work together to increase the number of women in technology roles in the United Kingdom through shared best practice.

At the moment, just 5 per cent of STEM apprenticeship starts in Scotland are women. In the UK as a whole, the percentage of women studying a STEM degree makes up just 25 per cent of the total; that figure has been stagnant for the past two years. I welcome the effort by the Scottish Government to improve girls' uptake of STEM subjects, but if we are to have a serious impact on those figures we have to ask ourselves as individuals how we are encouraging the young women and girls in our lives to consider a career in STEM. In Scotland's year of young people, it is more important than ever that we look at how education and decisions that are made early in life impact on young women for the rest of their lives.

On women in the workplace more generally, figures relating to the gender pay gap make truly uncomfortable reading. Four decades on since the Equal Pay Act was passed, the UK gender pay gap remains remarkably high. According to the Office for National Statistics, when all workers are included, the pay gap is 18.4 per cent. That means that, in effect, women work for free for 67 days of the year.

I am pleased to see that, in recent months, that has been spoken about more in the media and that women are becoming increasingly aware and confident in challenging the gulf that exists between male and female pay. As we saw recently with BBC presenters, it is absolutely right to challenge the status quo. After figures came to light that showed that most of the top earners were men, the gender pay gap became an embarrassing shadow that the BBC could no longer ignore.

Transparency is key. There has been a snowball effect as a result of just a few figures being made public, and pressure is now being laid on the BBC to publish data on the individual salaries of all its staff. I sincerely hope that the UK Government's wider policy on mandatory gender pay gap reporting will have a similar effect and will create a culture in which companies simply cannot afford to tarnish their image in that way.

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

Annie Wells: I would like to carry on, thank you.

In addressing why the gender pay gap exists, we must, of course, look at why women are not

better represented in the high-level executive jobs that we associate with high pay and big bonuses. Although we may differ on solutions at times, I am sure that we can all agree that it is clear that there are deep-rooted cultural and societal barriers that hold women back from taking top jobs. I strongly believe that, culturally, we are still peddling the same gender stereotypes of what we expect from girls and boys as they grow up. Women are also still faced with the overwhelming societal expectation that they should lead on childcare.

Companies desperately need to incorporate organisational designs that recognise those pressures and bring talented women up through the pipeline. As I have said many times, those companies exist. There is the example of the FDM Group, which is based in Glasgow. As politicians, we must seek out exemplary businesses and champion them in a way that encourages others.

International women's day is not just about the UK, of course. The World Economic Forum's publication "The Global Gender Gap Report 2017" told us that gender parity is over 200 years away. The wellbeing and status of women across the world is therefore central to our fight.

To put things into context, globally, one in three women has experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse; it is believed that one in five girls is married before the age of 18; around two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women; and, in developing countries and rural areas, agriculture remains the most important employment sector for women. That sector largely falls within the informal economy, and it has little or no social protection or labour rights. I am pleased that UK aid-funded programmes are working with organisations across the world to end violence against women and girls and to challenge the discriminatory practices that hold women back in family life, education and their working lives.

We must always strive to do more. Creating a life for millions of women in which they do not feel discriminated against, or in danger or still miss out on their desired opportunities, should be an aim that transcends this chamber and beyond.

It would not be right for me not to wish everyone a happy international women's day. I wish my mum the same. She is an inspiration to me—and I would have got it in the neck if I had not mentioned her.

As elected representatives, we all have a duty to work together as a Parliament and, indeed, in countries across the world to do more to achieve full equality for women. We sense that the tide is turning, but we should never be complacent. We are 200 years away from achieving gender equality, and that is 200 years too long.

I move amendment S5M-10851.1, to insert after "globally;":

"notes that more girls are studying STEM subjects and law but more must be done to retain and promote women, as men still dominate these fields at senior levels; welcomes the work of the UK Government to address issues such as the gender pay gap;"

14:49

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I wish that my role as women and equality spokesperson did not need to exist. I wish that international women's day did not need to exist. However, 100 years after the first women in this country were allowed to vote, and 109 years since the first international women's day, there are still many battles that need to be won.

The theme of this year's international women's day is press for progress, and that is the reasoning behind our amendment. The Government's motion talks about progress made, and our amendment keeps pressing for progress. That creates the right balance.

My colleague Monica Lennon will talk about her campaign to stop period poverty when she winds up the debate. That issue, which has been long overlooked, has become a real difficulty in these times of austerity. Low pay and poor access to benefits make sanitary products unaffordable, which keeps women and girls out of education and the workplace. The issue has gained support throughout the chamber, so we need to continue to press for progress. The support is there: we need to make the progress.

Every year, on international women's day, there are celebrations and events all over the country and all over the world. It is great to see many male feminists acknowledging and thanking women for their contribution to society, but the fact remains that the best way really to thank women is to treat them with respect and to treat them as fellow human beings who deserve equality.

Many inherent issues are holding women back from fulfilling their potential. Violence, abuse and sexual harassment are seen as women's issues, even though the perpetrators are usually men, therefore it is a man's problem.

Inequality of pay and representation prevents women from reaching their economic potential, as well as from having the political power to change the system, which is already stacked against them. When we add to that any of the protected characteristics, women fare even worse. Women with disabilities, black and ethnic minority women and lesbians all face greater challenges and greater inequalities.

We need to press for progress against violence against women. This Parliament passed legislation

that criminalised psychological gender-based violence; some of our early members could only have dreamed of that, but we have now achieved it. The offence will be difficult to prosecute, but we must keep evaluating the impact, and ensuring that the police and prosecution services have the knowledge and training to do that. If the training is not adequate, perpetrators will get away and victims will not get justice. We have seen that happen in the case of revenge porn. Just this week, it was revealed that more than 60 per cent of cases reported to the police under a new law on revenge porn have not been passed to prosecutors. We need better justice for victims.

Even with some successes, which we all celebrate, there is still much more to do. Women are suffering violence and we need to strengthen the support services that help them to rebuild their lives. We have a huge gap between the criminal law and family law. The criminal court convicts someone of domestic abuse, yet the civil court often grants that same person access to their children and thereby to the abused partner. The abuser has access to all his victims to continue the abuse. How can the courts be so ignorant of the damage that that does to a child and an abused partner? A child is damaged by the abuse, their self-esteem is affected and their sense of safety and resilience is undermined. That damage can last a lifetime and have a serious impact on their future, yet we have courts that facilitate that abuse on behalf of the state. How wrong is that?

As a matter of urgency, we need to introduce legislation that protects children. We need domestic abuse courts throughout the country, staffed by suitably trained staff. The fiscals and sheriffs need to know what they are dealing with and to have a true understanding of the crime. Those same domestic abuse courts also need to deal with the family law issues that arise out of these cases, such as custody, access and divorce. That highlights the need for split payments; Richard Leonard raised that issue today at First Minister's question time. Domestic abuse starts with financial abuse. Women need to be able to have financial independence; the Government must consider that and change its stance on split payments at stage 3 of the Social Security (Scotland) Bill in order to give women the protection that they need.

We need to press for progress on sexual exploitation, to free women from that damaging practice, which is increasing in our society rather than decreasing. If we want true equality, women cannot and should not be commodities to be bought and sold in Scotland, because that demeans all women. Sexual exploitation creates an atmosphere of entitlement in men and therefore encourages sexual violence.

Respect within relationships is not taught to young people at home or in school. They get much of their sex education from extreme pornography, which also leads to an increase in sexual violence. How can someone be equal if they do not command the same respect as someone of the opposite sex?

Recently, the High Court of Justice ruled that women who had been forced into prostitution and criminalised as a result should not have to reveal those convictions. Although that ruling is a step in the right direction, it seems odd to me that women can still be convicted when it is against their human rights to be forced to reveal those convictions. I ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking with regard to that ruling and whether it will lead to changes in our legislation.

It is simply wrong that women are criminalised when the men who have abused them get off scot free. Fiona Broadfoot, one of the women who took that case, said:

"Not one of those men who bought and used and abused me—even the ones who knew fine well I was a child when first put on the streets—has ever had to face the consequences of his actions."

It is time for change, and we need to press for progress.

Although we take pride in all the advances that have been made, we recognise that we are still a long way off from true equality. On international women's day, we need to redouble our efforts. We need to press for progress and we need to make progress. I hope that, in my lifetime, debates such as this will no longer exist and that women will truly be equal.

I move amendment S5M-10851.2, to insert at end:

“, and notes that the theme of this International Women's Day is Press for Progress and, in this vein, presses for progress on the elimination of violence against women, closing the gender pay gap, ending period poverty and, for once and for all, smashing the glass ceiling that prevents women achieving their full potential.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches will be of six minutes, although I have quite a bit of time in hand, so there is room to be flexible and to give time back for interventions.

14:57

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Today is international women's day. Someone, who will remain nameless, asked me earlier, "When is international men's day?" That reminded me of when I was younger, and on mothers' day rather petulantly asking my mum, "When's daughters' day?" Her response was this: "Every day is daughters' day."

International women's day is a celebration that is held across the world to mark the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. In 1908, 15,000 women marched through the streets of New York demanding better pay and working hours and the right to vote. In 1910, at the international conference of working women in Copenhagen, a proposal was voted on and passed, that in every country, on the same day, a national day of women would be held to highlight inequality wherever it could be found, whether in the home or at work, and to press for change.

In 1911, the day was held in a number of European countries on 19 March, but it was not until 1913 that a date of 8 March was agreed internationally. By that time, millions of women around the globe had become aware of the need to highlight terrible working conditions, of the complete absence of any legislative employment protections and of the need to provide a platform for social justice. In 1975, the United Nations announced an international women's year. Before 1975, most married women could get financial credit only if a man guaranteed their loan, girls were not allowed to play rugby or football at school, and many schools taught boys and girls different subjects. That was only two years before I was born.

In 1999, the Scottish Trades Union Congress put forward a women's agenda for the Scottish Parliament. It included championing of family-friendly policies and equal pay; tackling bullying and harassment; extending the provision of flexible, accessible and affordable childcare; embracing the principles of lifelong learning; and ensuring that women are properly represented in Parliament at all levels in policy and decision making.

How far we have come. We have already passed in this parliamentary session ground-breaking legislation that will undoubtedly help women. However, it is not only the legislation that we pass in this Parliament that has an effect on how women are seen and treated. Although we have come far, we still have much to do.

Some of the attitudes that still exist in society today find an outlet in the remarks, insults and sometimes even threats that are aimed at female politicians. Everyday correspondence to my office can and does include language and comments that would never be included in correspondence to a man. I know that, because I used to work for a male MSP. We see much worse online, with comments on everything from appearance to sexuality, and people typing whatever comes into their head, without consideration of the consequences. It is not true that once we become elected we become political robots—we are still

human beings with feelings and with families. Moreover, we cannot pretend that the results from the recent sexual harassment survey that was conducted here in Parliament are anything but highly alarming.

It is international women's day, however, so I will take a minute to talk about one inspirational woman from international politics. Any female politician or, to be honest, any woman who has not read Hillary Clinton's book "What Happened" should do so immediately. Whether we agree with her politics or not, she gives a great insight into the way she was treated during the presidential election campaign. I was struck by a paragraph in which she talks about some advice that she received about being a female politician:

"Women are seen favourably when they advocate for others, but unfavourably when they advocate for themselves. For example, there's virtually no downside to asking for a raise if you're a man. You'll either get it or you won't but you won't be penalized for trying. A woman who does the same is more likely to pay a price. Even if she gets a salary bump, she'll lose a measure of goodwill. The exception is when a woman asks for a raise on someone else's behalf. Then she's seen as generous and a team player. You have a steep mountain to climb. They will have no empathy for you."

Moving on to science, we all know the name Marie Curie—the first person to win two Nobel prizes—but how many people know that she was prevented from joining France's Academy of sciences because she was a woman? Rosalind Franklin played a huge part in decoding the structure of DNA, but three men claimed the Nobel prize for the discovery. Astrophysicist Jocelyn Bell Burnell discovered pulsars, but her male supervisor claimed the Nobel prize. Lise Meitner was pivotal in the discovery of nuclear fission, but not only did she not get the Nobel prize, she was not even allowed on the floors where the male scientists worked. Again, we have come so far, but we still have more to do.

We see so much lip service being paid to women's rights, including warm words on social media and good intentions being outlined in press releases, but words are no substitute for deeds. Action is required—not just a crowd-pleasing, box-ticking exercise. We need to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and abuse, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, belittling sexist and misogynist language, judging women on their appearance, and saying that 50:50 quotas prevent women from taking positions on merit. Women have the merit; quotas merely give them the opportunities. We need a zero-tolerance approach to being treated like second-class citizens and as if we should still be chained to the sink, barefoot and pregnant.

This year will prove to be pivotal in the fight for women's rights, equality and respect. We will not

settle for being paid less than men or for being asked in an interview whether we plan to start a family. We are here to contribute, challenge and compete. So, let us celebrate women—all women. I will celebrate my mum, my sisters, my aunties, my nieces, my cousins, my friends and my sisters in this chamber and around the world, and I will bring up my son to celebrate and respect women. Women are looking for us here to set not just laws but an example. Let us make sure, first and foremost, that this Parliament can be held up as a place where women feel safe, valued and appreciated. Let us make sure that every day is women's day.

15:04

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this international women's day debate. There are many topics that could be covered: the gender pay gap, childcare provision, sexual harassment, violence and abuse against women domestically and in war zones, and equal representation, to name but a few.

However, I want to focus on the legal profession and to look at the number of young girls who choose to study law and the opportunities that women have in the profession, assessing in particular the progress that has been made by women in that currently male-dominated profession.

Interestingly, according to the latest statistics that are available from the Scottish Parliament information centre, in 2015-16, of the students who graduated with a law degree in Scotland, 63.5 per cent were female and 36.5 per cent were male. In the same year, of those who completed the diploma in professional legal practice that is required to be taken after the LLB degree in order to become a solicitor, 66.1 per cent were female and 33.9 per cent were male. According to the Law Society of Scotland, since 2012 more women have completed legal traineeships than men. In 2016-17, the figures were 322 women and 173 men.

Thereafter, as the next career stages progress, it becomes evident that the higher percentage of women than men starts to decline. In 2015, marginally more fully qualified female lawyers held practising certificates than men.

However, in terms of women reaching the top of the legal profession, Scotland can be proud of some exceptional women who have, during the past decade, provided hugely encouraging examples of how women can lead the way for the younger intake of female lawyers. Scotland's first female Lord Advocate—the head of criminal prosecution in Scotland—Dame Elish Angiolini,

was appointed in 2006 and held the post until 2011. Although the head of the judiciary in Scotland, the Lord President of the Court of Session and Lord Justice General, has never been a woman, the Lord Justice Clerk, Scotland's second most senior judge is, for the very first time, a woman—Lady Dorrian.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am fascinated by Margaret Mitchell's progress, although I am not sure where she is going. The Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee looked at the gender pay gap. Does she think that it is just a matter of time until women take up more senior positions, or do we need to do something positive in order to move forward?

Margaret Mitchell: I hope to develop that theme, but my point is that many more young girls are now qualifying in law. I therefore expect to see a corresponding increase in women filling senior places. As I go on, I hope to tell Parliament what I think needs to happen to encourage that.

Of the 35 senators of the College of Justice in Scotland who sit in the Court of Session and the High Court, 10 are women. At sheriff court level, however, the numbers are less encouraging. Of the 142 permanent or resident sheriffs sitting in our 39 sheriff courts, only 27 are women.

At UK level, the Supreme Court is led by Baroness Hale of Richmond, who is the first female head of the judiciary in the United Kingdom. She was also the first woman law lord in 2004, and then the first woman Justice of the Supreme Court in 2009. However, of the other 11 members of the Supreme Court, only one justice—Lady Black of Derwent—is a woman.

At Europe level, the European Parliament conducted a study of the legal profession across EU countries in August 2017. It revealed that women predominate in practice areas such as family and child law, and that their presence in commercial law practice areas is increasing. The trend has been reflected in an increase in the number of female partners in large pan-European law firms. Significantly, the reason that is given for that change is that because commercial practice is becoming more about negotiation and client care than about contentious litigation, it has seen an increased requirement for skills that are "stereotypically possessed by women".

The European study also found that, although there is an increase in the number of women who are entering the legal profession and becoming partners, the number of women progressing to partnership or elite levels in the advocacy profession is still very small.

Scotland has much to be proud of. There has undoubtedly been a significant increase in the number of women entering the legal profession

but, equally, with some notable exceptions, there is still a steep hill to climb before that trend is reflected at the top of the profession in years to come.

I hope that, by raising awareness about stereotypes and addressing the wider societal issues—including adequate childcare provision and presumption about who bears the burden of caring for children or other dependants—a level playing field can be achieved that will provide all women with the opportunities to reach the top of the legal profession. In the meantime, we recognise and pay tribute to trailblazers such as Baroness Hale and Dame Elish Angiolini for the breakthroughs that they have made, which will pave the way for future generations of women.

15:10

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Where Margaret Mitchell finished off is a good place to start, because gender parity is at least 200 years away, according to the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2017". Even slaves did not wait that long to have their freedom respected. Although we know that gender parity will not happen overnight—or maybe not even in three centuries—the good news is that, across the world, women are making positive gains day by day. Plus, there is a strong and growing global movement of advocacy, activism and support.

We in Scotland will not let up. Now, more than ever, there is a strong call to action to push forward and progress gender parity. It is a strong call to press for progress and motivate and unite friends, colleagues and whole communities to think, act and be gender inclusive. The press for progress campaign has five asks: maintain a gender parity mindset, challenge stereotypes and bias, forge positive visibility of women—we are doing well today, girls—influence others' beliefs and actions, and celebrate women's achievements. My, we have a lot to celebrate.

Every member in the chamber has a responsibility, regardless of gender, to actively support equality and fairness in all its facets. I have said before in the chamber that men of quality should never fear equality. That is a good statement for today.

We have legislation, commissions, equal rights and legal protection provided by the European convention on human rights and European law, reinforced by our own laws around fairness and equality for all people. We have had some major, hard-fought and well-won victories against employers who have underpaid their female staff for decades. That is why today is a great day for saying that, no, we will not sit quietly and accept

the status quo. We will fight it all the time and we will fight it hard until the need for fighting has gone because inequality has gone.

We need to press still harder for progress, risk irritating some of the angry men and, perhaps most important of all, stop seeing ourselves as the second-rate humans that some members of society seem to feel it is appropriate to call us. Women of every age, background, ethnicity and religion—prosperous or not—are already engaged in that process. What we all want, and what Scotland is determined to win, is simple: we want to be treated equally. It is not difficult.

Let us look at some international examples of that. Take the Mzuzu Coffee Planters Co-operative Union, for instance, which grows and trades in coffee beans in Malawi. The original beans were transported via Zanzibar from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, so we have a link to that coffee that is grown in Malawi. The other night, I met Bernard Kaunda, who is the general manager of the Mzuzu Coffee Planters Co-operative Union, at the Hamilton fair trade group meeting. He informed me of the great success of a gendered aspect of the work that the co-operative does with women, which includes coffee beans that are produced by women being sold with a 20 cents premium added. That 20 cents is saved and distributed to women in a microfinancing model to build businesses and grow local economies. It has been incredibly successful and has resulted in many new women entrepreneurs and businesses developing in Malawi. That is all from a coffee bean from Edinburgh.

Let us take this to a more local level. Jigsaw Travel on Wellhall Road in Hamilton was founded in 1998 by Lesley Millar. The business is a corporate bespoke travel company specialising in complex, personalised travel bookings. It was the winner in 2016 and 2017 of the Scottish Passenger Agents Association best small business (travel agent) award and has been nominated for several Glasgow and Lanarkshire business awards. The company has clients from all over the UK, so what was a local business has grown—like that coffee bean—to have a strong national base. The Federation of Small Businesses has nominated Lesley Millar as one of the top 100 businesswomen in the UK—a super accolade for Lesley and her team. The business has grown to employ seven members of staff, all of whom are women. I am sure that you will agree, Presiding Officer, that, today of all days, it is incredibly appropriate to highlight such a thriving business in my constituency.

Those are all great successes, but we have so much more to do. Even in our Government structures, we have work to do. In Yarl's Wood

detention centre, 120 women are on hunger strike. The centre has been described by Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons as

"a place of national concern".

The organisers of a protest that is being held today in Glasgow tell us that the strike

"is a refusal to submit to institutionally racist detention conditions which are an integral part of the 'hostile environment' policy currently being enforced by the UK Government."

It is a sad indictment of that policy. The Home Office wrote to the 120 hunger strikers on Saturday threatening to expedite their extradition and refusing to listen to their demands. Some of those women are experiencing horrific conditions in Yarl's Wood, including in some cases sexual assault. I stand with those women today, and I ask my colleagues in the chamber to do the same and send a message of solidarity.

Last year, the pussy hat revolution resulted in me getting a row from the Presiding Officer for donning my fetching pink hat. I will not be doing that this year, but the message is still absolutely clear. The Presiding Officer has got her evil eye on. It is, maybe, a small push against the establishment, but every act of pressing for progress takes us closer to the more equal world that we all wish to live in.

Just like those suffragists 100 years ago with their good cause, we have many good causes, and we have heard about them today. One is press for progress, another is #MeToo and another is time's up—a campaign that tells the misogynists that the clock has run out on sexual assault, harassment and inequality in the workplace. Time's up for misogyny, harassment, unequal pay and inequality. Time's up is not a slogan—it is a directive, so I ask my colleagues here today, "What will you do to press for progress?"

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind everyone that we still have a bit of time in hand, if people feel the urge to make interventions.

15:17

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Today, on international women's day, it is great to see a woman presiding over us.

History is written by the winners and, for as long as we have been living in a patriarchal society, the winners have been men. In "A Room of One's Own", Virginia Woolf wrote:

"the majority of women are neither harlots nor courtesans"—

I heartily agree—

"nor do they sit clasping pug dogs to dusty velvet all through the summer afternoon. But what do they do then?"

She continues:

"For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups are washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world ... No biography or history has a word to say about it."

When Oscar winner Frances McDormand invited women to stand up and be visible because their stories should be told, it made me think of my countless sisters who have been invisible, in Scotland and across the world. International women's day is here to celebrate and create a space for women, where our stories should be told.

Today, to misquote RuPaul, we celebrate herstory. The fight for women's equality is intertwined with the history of the labour movement. A working class woman, Selina Cooper, a suffragist and mill worker from the north of England, put it best when she said that women did not want the vote "as a mere plaything". Instead,

"Every woman ... is longing for her political freedom in order to make the lot of the worker pleasanter and to bring about reforms".

Emmeline Pankhurst was one of the founding members of the Labour Party, and the Labour movement agreed with her when she said that she hoped that our movement might be the means of

"righting every political and social wrong."

Of course, it is not the only means of doing that—people across all parties, and those of no party, do it—but I am proud of the Labour movement's history.

As the cabinet secretary said, today some MSPs are going to commemorate Mary Barbour with the unveiling of her statue in Glasgow. She was Glasgow's first Scottish female councillor and led the South Govan Women's Housing Association during the Glasgow rent strikes of 1915, actively organising tenant committees and eviction resistance, which cannot have been easy.

Women here in Scotland and across the world have always stood up for the rights of others, writing themselves into history in the process. Ida B Wells, one of my mother's countrywomen, was one of the first ever investigative journalists in the USA. She wrote about and led an anti-lynching crusade in the United States in the 1890s, travelling, as a black woman, to the southern states—a hugely dangerous undertaking while the Jim Crow laws were in full force.

With works from Austen to Brontë, to Eliot, to Angelou and Sarah Waters, women's writing is seen as the very best in our literary history. Why, then, after 100 years, are women journalists like

Ida B Wells still in the minority? She broke new ground and her voice and work have echoes in today's Zero Tolerance write to end violence against women awards, which take place every year here in our Parliament and drive up standards in journalism by awarding those committed to furthering the cause of gender equality through their work.

Yesterday, Zero Tolerance, the 25th anniversary of which we celebrate this year, reminded us that the portrayal of women and girls in the media has a direct influence on people's attitudes and behaviour. Although we all know that, media monitoring by the charity shows that the skewed and dangerous perspective of nine major newspapers exposes people to the wrong sort of language—and language matters. It is distressing that this year major newspapers are still reporting such grievous crimes as rape and sexual assault as “sex”, failing to set the story in the context of violence against women and giving sensationalised and graphic descriptions.

Part of the solution is the employment of more women journalists. However, whatever our gender, we have a collective responsibility to use the right language. I am pleased that, at the most recent awards, which many of us here today attended, the National Union of Journalists Scotland highlighted the importance of that and supported the awards.

I spoke about Virginia Woolf at the beginning of this short speech. She discussed what it would take to have more female writers and identified

“A room of one's own”

and £500 a year—perhaps that has gone up a bit now. In doing so, she summed up the fact that women will achieve equality only through economic independence. It was a Labour Government that put her words into law through the Equal Pay Act 1970, but as others have highlighted, we are still nowhere near where we should be with that. The fight has not ended by any means.

As Richard Leonard and my friend and colleague Rhoda Grant highlighted today, we as a Parliament have the power to help some of the most marginalised women in Scotland through economic agency—it requires ministers to bring forward regulations that will ensure that the payments of universal credit are automatically split between both members of a couple. That would be particularly helpful to women in an abusive relationship and it would give them financial empowerment.

Angela Constance: I am very grateful to Ms Beamish for giving way on what is a hugely important and sensitive matter. I think that we are at one on this. The point that the First Minister

made this afternoon was that, although we are supportive of split payments, we rely on getting the agreement of the Department for Work and Pensions to do it—then we would have to make them. I hope that members across the parties will encourage their colleagues in the House of Commons to support Philippa Whitford's private member's bill, through which we could deal with this very issue at source for all women across the UK.

Claudia Beamish: I welcome that intervention, because part of the issue is that good women and good men work need to work together in this chamber and globally on those issues. I am sure that we will reach a resolution on the matter, and we must.

As Virginia Woolf said,

“the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.”

It might not seem like a great act of history to make that change to universal credit. However, year after year, our fine words on international women's day have been turned into tangible actions by many such small changes that were made by women to ensure our safety and economic security. Let us do that, and so much more, together.

15:25

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): My speech today should have been the easiest that I have had to write. My speech last year was one of the easiest that I have ever written, but my speech this year, in this week, was not. I was going to use my whole six minutes to talk about my project to map a tourist trail around Scotland that recognises the women who have shaped Scotland—and I will get on to that—but I just could not stand up today and not talk about the continued and distressingly all-too-close-to-home subject of the sexual harassment of women.

I am all for free speech, but I find myself wanting to erase phrases from our discourse around the rights that women should have to feel safe, unimpeded and respected in the workplace in particular. One such phrase is “It's only banter”. Maybe to the person who is delivering it, who thinks that he is being the most hilarious man on the planet, it is “only banter”. However, to the woman on the receiving end, who is too polite to say what she really thinks, or who feels that to speak vociferously would put her at risk, it is not “only banter”. They are words that diminish, control, objectify, insult, embarrass and distress.

Outright abuse and obvious unwanted physical contact are horrific, but they are not the only type of abuse. Insidious, sustained and thinly veiled sexual comments are not to be ignored, as they

have a pernicious and cumulative effect. Women worry that they will not be believed. Women know that they will be told that they are overreacting. Women know that people will question their complaint's validity. Women find it hard to put across the effect that the abuse has had on them. Women will also lie awake at night, wondering how they can escape the abuse—whether that is by leaving their job, by making arrangements never to be in that person's company or by voicing their complaints in a way that they know might reap the whirlwind.

On this day, I wear purple, the colour of feminism, and stand with all women who have ever felt abused, diminished and controlled by persistent, insidious workplace harassment—because I was one of those women. Even 25 years on from my harassment, I still think about what I could have done to stop it, and how hard it was to take any action. I salute those who, in the past year, were braver than me and who have taken action.

I can now talk about my project. Claudia Beamish has already said that history is written by the winners. I think that it is more accurate to say that history is written by the patriarchy. Some of the proof of that is on our high streets. If we look up, we see a statue of a general, a king, a male writer or a male poet. A Glasgow traffic cone does not sit upon the head of the bronzed hair bun of a suffragette; it sits upon the short back and sides of a military man.

There are simply not enough landmarks to represent the women who made Scotland, and those that there are should be given more importance. That is why I am pleased to say that I am playing a small part in helping the many people who have dedicated their lives to giving Scotland's women the recognition that they deserve, by working with VisitScotland and others to generate a tourist map of the existing landmarks of influential Scottish women. I am also asking the public, including everyone in the chamber, to get in touch with me so that I can get more information on the women in Scotland's history who they would like to be recognised who are not already. I thank Glasgow Women's Library, which has already been in touch to help me with the project.

I am sad to say that there is not one statue of a woman in my constituency. However, in the neighbouring constituency of Banffshire and Buchan Coast, there is Fisher Jessie, the beautiful statue of a Peterhead fish seller and her child. To me, she is a symbol of the juggling act—caring for a child by her side as she works, humphing her basket of fish with her shawl across her shoulders, and representing the ordinary north-east women who were the engine of a country.

I was delighted to see that a statue of the hero of the Glasgow rent strikes, Mary Barbour, and the others whom she led was unveiled today in Govan. However, in our capital city, there are more statues of animals than of women, despite the existence of great Edinburgh women such as Muriel Spark and Elsie Inglis.

Of course, my colleague Fiona Hyslop was instrumental in getting a plaque put up for Sophia Jex Blake, the leader of the Edinburgh seven who, along with Isabel Thorne, Edith Pechey, Matilda Chaplin, Helen Evans, Mary Anderson, and Emily Bovell, was among the first women to be admitted to a university in the UK. They were stalked and harassed by male students, and a mob of 200 rioted outside Surgeons' Hall when the women arrived for an exam. The university ultimately refused to grant them degrees, but in 1899, following the efforts of the Edinburgh seven, an act of Parliament sanctioned degrees for women.

I put on record my support for the campaign in Ayrshire, with which my colleague Ruth Maguire is involved, to put up a monument to recognise the many women who were victimised by the Scottish witch trials. That is a part of women's history in Scotland that is seriously overlooked.

In my constituency, which I always mention, we could do with more recognition of Strichen's Lorna Moon, who was a novelist and Hollywood screenwriter in the cinema industry's infancy. I would like to think that Lorna Moon was the sort of person who was behind the speech Frances McDormand made at the Oscars, which was mentioned earlier. I would also be delighted to see the suffragette Caroline Phillips recognised. Those women did not do things in order to be commemorated with plaques and statues, but they changed our world and should be recognised.

Dr Alison McCall, the convener of women's history Scotland, says that women's underrepresentation in the civic landscape has been partly due to the way that those women viewed themselves. She says that a lot of the women we would want to honour are women who saw a problem and set about solving it. They did not donate their diaries to an archive because they were never thinking of their own personal glorification, but glorify them we must, because they inspire others. Evening out the representation of women is another part of the jigsaw that will address women's inequality.

15:31

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): So here we are, on international women's day 2018 and, as Christina McKelvie and others have noted, the World Economic Forum's 2017 global gender gap report tells us that gender parity is still more than

200 years away. It is absolutely right, therefore, that this year's theme is #PressForProgress, as women have waited far too long already—haven't we just?

On this international women's day, we are asked to

"concentrate on 5 specific actions to press for progress for gender parity"

in our own sphere of influence. In that sphere of influence, I am proud to be involved in women 50:50. I believe that that is a good example of using the reach that we as parliamentarians have to demonstrate our commitment to gender parity. To all who are listening to this debate I say, if you have not yet joined us, please do.

Let me say more on those "specific actions". On this international women's day, we are called to maintain a "gender parity mindset". If such a mindset was adopted, welfare reform would not be aimed almost exclusively at women, as if they were a target for cuts. On a more positive note, I believe that the Scottish women's budget group is that "gender parity mindset" in action.

We are called on to challenge stereotypes and bias and I welcome the light that is being shone on some of the darkest corners of that bias through campaigns such as #MeToo.

We are also called on to influence other people's beliefs and actions. Women 50:50 is working hard to explain why the lack of women in representative politics, our boardrooms and our public bodies matters. I want people to ask, when they are watching First Minister's questions or following proceedings in our town halls, "Why are there so few women in here? Where are they?" I say to anyone sitting in the gallery that the chamber does not normally have the gender balance that it has at the moment. We know that girls are doing well in school, and young women are excelling in our universities, so why are they not here in greater numbers, helping to shape the laws that shape our country?

We are asked, too, to forge positive visibility of women. That is something that we can and do, do; thank you colleagues.

Finally, we are asked to celebrate women's achievements, and I believe that we need to get much better at doing that. Celebrating those achievements will help us to achieve those other four asks.

On this international women's day, I am delighted to celebrate, first, some very recent achievements. At last week's world indoor championships, the British athletics team won medals in seven events. The team won 10 medals in all, because the women's 4x400 team won bronze, and women won nine of the 10 medals.

Four of those medals were hard won by the incredible efforts of Scotland's Laura Muir, who won silver and bronze over two events, Eilidh Doyle, who won her first global individual medal, with bronze in the 400 metres, and Zoey Clark in that 4x400 team.

Those women are incredible role models. Laura Muir will not be competing in the Commonwealth games, which we will be watching soon, because she is completing her veterinary medicine degree. Eilidh Doyle, who recently spoke at the Scottish Athletics event in this Parliament, is a qualified physical education teacher, and her positive influence has been recognised; she is included in the Young Women's Movement Scotland list of 30 inspiring women who are under 30.

I am proud to report that that inspirational list includes the first Green councillor in the east end of Glasgow, Councillor Kim Long. Kim, like all the other women whom we celebrate today, rises to a challenge. She says:

"as a teenager I really hated PE, but I went on to play hockey for Scotland."

She was also the moderator of the national youth assembly, where she pushed for young people's voices to be embedded in decision-making processes. She became the first young person ever to be on a special commission: the special commission on same-sex relationships and the ministry. Members can read about her many achievements on the 30 under 30 website, where Kim says:

"My personal highlight was when I got a bunch of men in Barlinnie to sing in three-part harmony".

She regards that as one of her stand-out achievements. Kim goes on to say:

"I want to see girls and young women taking up space, whether that is physically or vocally, in boardrooms, sports pitches, stages and classrooms—really wherever they want to be, but taking up space."

As members said, we need collective empowerment. We also need to realise that some people face even greater challenges because of the structures in which we live.

As Claudia Beamish said, history is written by the winners. Kim Long was at the unveiling of the statue of Mary Barbour in Glasgow today. The statue is long overdue. If the gender gap is bad, the gender statue gap highlights how poor we have been—we have not been good, to put it mildly—at celebrating women's achievements. Now, I am the deputy convener of the cross-party group on animal welfare. I am passionate about animals and I am very pleased that we have statues of a bear and a dog in this wonderful city, but we can do much better when it comes to gender representation, if we want to continue to mark people and their achievements in that way.

Another young woman on the 30 under 30 list is the writer Kirsty Strickland, who has won awards for her writing on violence against women. She has been a judge on awards on the subject, too. She, too, talks about the need for women to be confident enough to take up space. She says:

"I've struggled with 'imposter-syndrome' in the past, and wasted far too much time worrying that I'm not good enough, or clever enough, or brave enough to do the things I want to in life. For young women, your time is precious. Please don't waste a second of it worrying that you aren't good enough; you ARE. So take up space, make yourself heard, know your worth and go out and achieve your potential. And know that while you are doing that, other women are rooting you on and delighted to see you succeeding."

There are only 30 women on the list, but we know that there are tens of thousands of young women who should be celebrated. One who is not on the list but who deserves a special mention is Catherine Gemmell, of the Marine Conservation Society, who has done fabulous work on the reduction of plastics in Scotland, through her enthusiasm and passion—many people in this building have met her.

Finally, given that this is international women's day, I draw attention to the work of Kenyan activist, and a personal heroine of mine, Wangari Maathai. She died in 2011, and I did not know much about her until members of the Kenyan-Scottish community in Edinburgh invited me to plant trees with them in Figgate park, just a couple of miles from here. Wangari Maathai was the founder of the Green Belt Movement, which has planted more than 51 million trees across Kenya, conserving the environment, providing employment for women and reducing poverty. She said:

"It's the little things citizens do. That's what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees."

Let our little thing be a refusal to accept the status quo and a determination to challenge it in all that we do, working together until women in Scotland and across the globe have our long-overdue equality.

15:39

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I say to Alison Johnstone that this little thing will certainly not let certain aspects rest. [*Laughter.*] Having been born and brought up in Govan and listened to my granny and my aunties and others, I am incredibly proud that we have the statue of Mary Barbour at last. As has been said before, there are so many fantastic women, and we should be honouring them.

I congratulate everyone who has spoken so far. Like so many women past and present, they have done a fantastic job.

I want to quote an important part of the motion. It says:

"the Parliament unites on International Women's Day to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls, which are fundamental human rights".

We should repeat that constantly—"fundamental human rights"—because it affects women and girls. Imagine having to say that.

I could talk about many women from my past, from Margaret Ewing to various other political figures, but I want to talk about the fantastic work that is going on in a number of areas in my constituency.

A young girl who came to see me when she was a student and who has gone from success to success founded FemEng, which is a network that aims to link females in the school of engineering at the University of Glasgow. The group has a number of focuses including outreach work with schools, networking events with industry professionals, social activities and international collaborations.

FemEng was started as a sub-group within the Glasgow university engineering society by a young girl, or a young lady, called Ellen Simmons. She came into my constituency office in Argyle Street in Glasgow to tell me about that fantastic project. She was so enthused about her ideas, and I just took it from there and met the other students. The network has gone from strength to strength since 2015, when it was first announced. In 2016, FemEng became formally affiliated with the Women's Engineering Society, and they have established a fantastic collaborative relationship.

Since the group's early days, one of its aims has been to take its message into the wider community around Glasgow and beyond. It has found that pupils are often unaware of the vast range of disciplines that can be studied in higher education and sometimes struggle to see how their skills could be applied to the engineering industry. That is where FemEng is very successful. It offers informative presentations about the different engineering disciplines and what life is like as a student and advice for pupils about applying to university. It also has strong links with colleges and it delivers campus tours and presentations for visiting groups. It does not necessarily mentor, but it certainly supports women—and young women in particular—who want to go into engineering.

FemEng believes that one of the main deterrents for females who are studying or considering studying engineering is that there is a lack of positive role models in the industry. That is where Ellen and her friends and fellow students come into it. FemEng aims to bridge the gap between the university student and the industry

professional and to give students an idea of where their degree could take them. One of the ways in which they do that is by hosting informal networking events, which they call FutureYou. At those events, they invite successful female industry professionals and alumni to give a brief presentation answering the question, “How did you get to where you are now?” That helps to build up the confidence of the young engineering students.

In 2016—this was a fantastic idea, and it has been very successful—the group successfully pioneered FemEng in Rwanda, which was the university’s first student-led learning project in collaboration with the University of Rwanda. Lots of men were killed in the genocide in Rwanda, so there were many women and not as many men. The initiative brought together female engineering students from the two universities with the common goal of encouraging more high school girls in Rwanda to pursue further education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The project has gone from strength to strength, and I wish it all success for the future.

Like Alison Johnstone, I want to mention Laura Muir, who is studying at the University of Glasgow. To date, she has won seven medals, including two gold medals. Her most recent victories were at the world indoor championships in Birmingham, where she won silver and bronze medals. Laura also won the sport award in the inspiring city awards last year, which is a collaborative project of Glasgow Life, *The Herald* and the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. She is a fantastic role model for young people.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is ample time if you feel obliged to take Mr Doris’s intervention.

Bob Doris: I am delighted that Sandra White has taken my intervention, because I would like to mention another remarkable lady, who I had the opportunity to meet the other day. Sylvia Douglas runs the social enterprise Ms Miss Mrs, which is based on Benview Street just between my and Sandra White’s constituencies. The organisation works to build capacity and to empower women in my constituency and across north Glasgow, with a particular focus on deprived communities. This is a good opportunity to put on record the great work that the organisation does. I hope that there are organisations around the country that can do similar work, particularly in deprived communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will make up your time for the intervention, Ms White.

Sandra White: I thank Bob Doris for that and perhaps look forward to making a joint visit to the group, which would be fantastic.

I cannot finish without mentioning the Glasgow girls, who were already mentioned by the cabinet secretary. From the very beginning of their campaign, Christina McKelvie and I were involved. We must pay tribute to Euan Girvan, who was the headteacher at Drumchapel high school and who got those girls together. It took a huge amount of courage to go forward, but we know the story of what happened with the dawn raids and the fantastic work that the group did, particularly the seven young women, in highlighting the poor treatment of asylum seekers.

I will continue a wee bit longer to talk about what happened to some of the Glasgow girls. I still meet Amal and Roza socially and go on demos with them, as they are very much involved in social justice. Roza went on to study law and politics at the University of Strathclyde; she stood as a Scottish National Party candidate in the most recent local council elections and came very close to winning. That just shows the courage that those young girls had.

Basically, women should support women. The Glasgow girls, Amal and Roza in particular, are a beacon for what women can do when they get encouragement.

15:47

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate and for the consensus on the Government’s motion. My life has been filled by the impact of extraordinary women and their impression on my world has been profound. I want to focus on one woman in particular in my remarks today.

In April 1940, my great-aunt Joan worked in Foreign Office intelligence as part of the British legation to Oslo. She stood side by side with the celebrated spy chief Frank Foley, burning intercepts and manifests as Wehrmacht divisions overran the city. As a key member of the Foley group, she helped to rescue the Norwegian Government and King, escaping overland by car and foot through the snow, through Lillehammer and on to the coast. From there, after providing vital communications support to the Norwegian resistance, she was evacuated by submarine back to Britain and was awarded an MBE in the 1941 new year’s honours list for her service. She was only 23 years old.

I wish that I had known her. In her short career, she was present at some of the most defining moments of global history. She was part of the delegation to Yalta, and I can only imagine the

diplomat that she would have become if she had not been sadly lost to us when her plane disappeared over the Atlantic on her return journey from the San Francisco conference that established the United Nations at the end of the war.

When I think about aunt Joan, I am reminded of the frontiers that she had to push back as a young woman in a man's world. That she was decorated and mentioned in dispatches several times in the male-dominated landscape of military intelligence is testimony to the strength of her character and her resilience. I see that strength in the women in my life today and I honour them for it.

In the year that has passed since we last marked this occasion, it has been my great privilege to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Scottish Government and with members of all parties in support of the changes that we have delivered in advancing women's rights and gender equality, in landmark domestic violence legislation, in the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill and in the widespread condemnation of the rape clause.

However, we still have frontiers to push back. I hope that, in the year to come, we can do more to challenge employers who still engage in maternity discrimination, make clothing demands in the workplace or ensure a gender pay gap of nearly 7 per cent across this country. Indeed, on that last issue, I was very glad to be involved in the University and College Union protest outside the Parliament at lunch time, in which people were talking, among other things, about pay disparity in the university and college sectors.

I want to see the advances that we are making in gender representation on public boards mirrored in the boardrooms of private companies, and I want a shift in the imbalance in which 50 per cent of graduates are female but only one fifth of UK companies are led or owned by women. Let this also be the year in which we finally see a modicum of justice for those women born in the 1950s who are victims of state pension inequality.

I am a feminist but, if I am honest, I do not think that that has always been true. My mother had been in the vanguard of the North American feminist movement of the 1960s and always brought me up with an understanding of respect and equality. However, when I think back on it, I spent so many of my formative years blissfully unaware of the privilege that I enjoyed as a boy and a young man. In the stereotypes that I conformed to and in the advantage that I accepted without question, I was often a happy beneficiary of the patriarchy.

To my shame, I was, at times, a passive witness to everyday sexism, systemic injustice and even

the harassment that Gillian Martin so eloquently described a few moments ago. I am not sure when I woke up to all this, but wake up I did, and over the past 20 years, I have striven to be both a better man and a better feminist to live up to the example set for me by my mother, my aunt, my sisters and all the female role models in my life. I have mentored female candidates in my party; I have helped steward all-women shortlists through its structures; and I have worked for gender balance in my party to the point where, as director of our national campaign in the snap general election, I helped reverse an imbalance that has existed since the inception of my party when we returned to Westminster a group of Scottish MPs half of whom were female.

However, it does not stop there. In every debate such as this, I rise with a not insignificant degree of embarrassment that I speak for a group of parliamentarians who are exclusively male. As a result, I offer this commitment: I will do everything in my power to ensure that the next group of Liberal Democrat parliamentarians that we return to this place, be it big or small, will look more like the society that we seek to represent and less like the Liberal front bench of 1916.

International women's day affords us the opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to gender equality, to take stock of the mountains that we still have to climb in pursuit of that aim and to recognise that attitudes and complicity such as those of my younger self can be turned around.

We will hear the words of many great women in today's debate, but I want to leave the chamber with those of a man, Indian movie star Amitabh Bachchan. Like me, he woke up to iniquities of the patriarchy that had benefited him so richly. He said:

"Because you are women, people will force their thinking on you, their boundaries on you. They will tell you how to dress, how to behave, who you can meet and where you can go. Don't live in the shadows of people's judgment. Make your own choices in the light of your own wisdom."

I see in those words the spirit and strength of my aunt Joan and the many great women with whom I am proud to share this chamber.

With that, I commend the motion to the chamber.

15:53

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): International women's day is just as important now as ever, and I am sure that this year's awareness day will help to progress the cause of true gender equality.

When I look around this chamber, I am proud to see many strong women beside me. Each and every day, my female colleagues across the

political divide show that politics is now very much the business of women. However, when I look back at political representation in the UK throughout history, I find it staggering that, since 1918, only 489 women have been elected as members of the House of Commons. Let me put that into context: until December 2016, there had been fewer women MPs ever than there had been men elected to the House of Commons at any one time.

We sit in a Parliament whose composition is now 35 per cent female. Although that demonstrates that things are moving in the right direction, we are still far from achieving gender parity. People look to our Parliament as an example. Therefore, I look forward to a future in which it better reflects Scotland's wider society.

Women of my age and younger have been afforded greater opportunities in their lives than our predecessors were, be that in education, in the workplace or elsewhere. That is thanks to the generations of women and men before us who advocated and fought for gender equality and parity of opportunity. In his message marking international women's day two years ago, the former secretary general to the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said that, as a society,

"We have shattered so many glass ceilings we created a carpet of shards."

He continued:

"Now we are sweeping away the assumptions and bias of the past, so women can advance across new frontiers."

As an MSP, I see it as my role—indeed, my duty—to continue fighting the fight of our mothers and grandmothers before us and to address current inequalities for the benefit of women and girls in the future. Society might now be fairer and more equal than ever before, but the progress has not moved swiftly enough, and women still face a number of injustices. As my colleague Gillian Martin noted, movingly, we continue to be subjected to sexism and sexual harassment; as Alison Johnstone mentioned, we are adversely affected by welfare reforms; and we continue to face massive barriers at work.

Notwithstanding pregnancy and maternity discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace and the fact that women are more than three times as likely as men to be working part time, women who work are often paid less than men. Last year was the year of the BBC gender pay gap controversy, which revealed stark differences in the salaries of public figures. However, that issue is not unique to the media or the celebrity world, as the gender pay gap impacts on almost every workforce across the UK. More women than ever before are working in professional, high-ranking jobs, but what use is

that when their pay is often less than that of their equivalent male counterparts?

According to research by the opportunity now campaign, in the UK, for every £1 that a man earns, a woman takes home 81p. As I am a committed trade unionist—I duly refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a member of Unison—it continues to be a real source of personal frustration to me that women continue to lose out in the workplace. Since 1997, the gender pay gap in Scotland has narrowed considerably, from 26.5 per cent in 1997 to 16.1 per cent in 2017. However, 16.1 per cent is 16.1 per cent too much.

An Ipsos MORI poll that was conducted recently asked respondents when they thought that pay and economic equality would be achieved. The average of the participants' answers was 2035. Nevertheless, members will not be surprised to hear that 2035 is a bit on the optimistic side, with the World Economic Forum suggesting that, at the current rate, women are not likely to reach economic parity with men until 2234. I doubt very much that I will be here to see that.

There are many drivers of the gender pay gap but, sadly, there is no one solution to the challenge of closing it. As with many of the injustices that women face, some barriers are systematic and cultural and will take generations to unravel. Nonetheless, many of the proactive measures that have been taken by the Scottish Government will go some way towards making Scotland more equal for our young women. For example, as a result of recent changes to the Equality Act 2010, public authorities are now forced to report their gender pay gap and publish equal pay statements if they employ more than 20 people—the figure is down from 150 employees previously. Furthermore, through the implementation of the developing the young workforce strategy, which is Scotland's youth employment strategy, we will address gender imbalances in young people's career choices and opportunities.

The Scottish Government is continuing to push employers to become living wage accredited. It is not right that more than 100,000 more women than men earn less than the living wage in Scotland, although the Government has ensured that Scotland has the highest proportion of employees who are paid the living wage of any country in the UK. International women's day should give us all a renewed impetus. We must continue to work together to close the gender pay gap not only for ourselves but for the generations to follow.

Today, just over 100 years on from women getting the right to vote, women not having the right to vote is viewed as a ludicrous idea. It is

viewed as old fashioned and belonging to history. I look forward to the day when gender inequality is seen as something that happened “in the olden days”, as my kids would say—an outdated concept that is consigned to the history books.

The motion alludes to the fact that this is Scotland’s year of young people, and we owe it to Scotland’s young people to do all that we can to create a fairer and more equal society. As has been evidenced in other speeches, through the #MeToo campaign and the time’s up movement we are witnessing profound changes in our world, and, for the most part, women are leading the way.

16:00

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I fully agree with Clare Haughey that we are surrounded by strong women today. I am lucky enough to have the same at home, with my wife and three daughters.

I welcome the opportunity to speak as we celebrate women and girls around the world on international women’s day. Although it is a day for celebrating accomplishments and the progress that has been made, it is also a day for recognising the progress that is still left to be made.

Globally, the female population continues to face inequality and injustices in nearly all aspects of life, from health and education to career opportunities and domestic abuse. Inequality issues in the workplace, lack of political representation, gender biases and sexual harassment continue to persist in society.

Over the past 40 years, we have come a long way from when I worked in the cotton mills in Paisley, where women mill workers were not allowed to wear trousers. If they became engaged to be married, they had to leave the company. Gosh! What an improvement there is today.

Campaigns such as the #MeToo and time’s up campaigns, which have been mentioned, have added momentum to the push for equality, which women deserve. Women now feel more empowered to speak about their experiences of inequality. We must take the opportunity to listen to women and girls in order to understand the injustices that they face and find solutions to achieve equality.

We all know that there are areas of Scottish society in which we must improve. In education and training, there has been a 47 per cent decline in the number of women enrolled in colleges. Over the same period, the fall in the number of men enrolled in colleges has been only 25 per cent. In

addition, only 5 per cent of those who started STEM apprenticeships in 2016-17 were female.

Women make up 50 per cent of the population but, in the political world, they make up only 35 per cent of MSPs and 24 per cent of local councillors. The Scottish Conservatives have recognised that we need to improve in that area, which is why my colleague Annie Wells launched the Women2Win Scotland campaign last year. She did so in order that women in the Conservative Party can receive the campaign training, networking and financial support that they need to run a successful campaign. In the past week, we have also launched a new diversity commission under the direction of Baroness Mobarik MEP to increase the number of women and minority candidates running under the Conservative banner for seats in the next Parliament.

Over the past 10 years or more, more women have taken up front-line operational roles in the armed forces on land and sea and in the air. Furthermore, they are achieving more senior command roles, which is only to be commended.

Let me move on to the slightly different topic of the Commonwealth women parliamentarians group, which was set up in the late 1980s. The CWP is a network of women members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s Parliaments and legislatures. As an integral part of the CPA, the CWP works for better representation of women in legislatures and the furtherance of gender equality across the Commonwealth. The CWP network provides a means of building the capacity of women who have been elected to Parliament to be effective in their roles; improving the awareness and ability of all parliamentarians—male and female—and encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role in legislation, oversight and representation; and helping overseas and Commonwealth Governments to become gender-sensitive institutions.

The Scotland branch of the CPA chaired the first meeting of the British islands and Mediterranean region CWP steering committee, in September 2013, and held the first regional CWP conference, in March 2014. My colleague Margaret Mitchell is the CPA Scotland branch representative on the CWP regional steering committee.

The CWP has recognised that, traditionally, women have been the main drivers of change on gender equality. However, although women are by far the strongest advocates for gender equality, all parliamentarians and Parliaments, as institutions, have a role, and the CWP has appealed to branches in the CPA to appoint male champions. The CWP requested that CPA branches nominate a male parliamentarian to act as CWP male champion, and I recently volunteered for that

role—to be truthful, it was with the strong encouragement of my wife and my daughters.

That initiative is in its infancy. However, I am looking forward to developing the role in the future for this Parliament and working in that role with other members from all sides of the chamber and with other CWP male champions within the region and elsewhere. As I was coming to the debate this afternoon, I was told that this Parliament is the first in the European Union to appoint a CWP male champion.

This year's theme for international women's day is press for progress, and I urge everyone to do just that: to press for progress in education, encouraging women to go to college and pursue careers in STEM, and to press for progress in the workplace, to close the wage gap and to end stigmas that suggest that women cannot hold executive positions.

We also need to press for progress in government, empower women to run for office and listen to their ideas and experiences, which will bring about real, productive change in creating equality for women. The experiences of women must be at the forefront of this equality movement; therefore, they need to be present and active in the forums in which change will be enacted.

Although international women's day is only a single day in the year, the sentiment lasts all year round and we must continue to make progress in achieving equality for all. I wish you all a happy international women's day.

16:06

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate on international women's day and to talk about the inspirational and amazing women who have shaped our society and contributed so much. As we have heard from all sides of the chamber, we have come a long way since the days when the suffragettes and suffragists fought hard and sacrificed so much to win the right to vote—something that we all now take for granted. Even my generation cannot believe that the vote was once denied to us.

In addition to giving credit to those talented and world-renowned women, I give credit to the inspirational women who do not make a name for themselves with their inventions or their heroic deeds. We have heard a lot about those women from other members. Inspirational women are all around us in our everyday lives. For me, my gran and my mother were amazing influences on how I grew up, which I know is not unusual. Their values and unconditional love gave me the security and values from which I benefit to this day.

As we know, not all children have the good fortune to grow up with inspirational role models in their lives, which is why, the more we learn about ACEs—adverse childhood experiences—the more we can help people to live happier lives. For several years, I wrote a feature called “Forgotten Heroes” for a magazine, highlighting the amazing contributions that largely overlooked Scots had made to the world throughout the centuries. However, I had to dig long and hard to find profiles of Scottish heroines, of which I knew there were many.

That has, sadly, been the case until recently. Women were virtually airbrushed from history—women like Elsie Inglis, the founder of the Scottish women's hospitals; Ayr's Marion Gray, a mathematician who influenced the telecom giants of today; geologist Maria Gordon from Aberdeen; and zoologist Muriel Robertson. I could go on, but time will not allow—my colleagues Gail Ross and Gillian Martin mentioned a lot more. It is great to hear about Gillian Martin's excellent project.

Thankfully, the situation is changing. A few weeks ago, I visited a school to record a video with pupils aged 12 to 14 and to talk about inspirational women. The school is also holding an event tomorrow to celebrate international women's day, which I will be attending. One boy asked me who my inspirational women are. After I had mentioned family and certain politicians, I mentioned Rosa Parks, the first lady of civil rights, who refused to give up her seat for a white passenger on a bus in Alabama in 1955. I honestly did not think that the pupils would have heard of her, but, to my delight, they all nodded and said they were doing a project on her at that time.

The next question that I was asked was: if I could bring back either suffragette Emily Davison or Jane Haining, who saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust, who would it be? It was an impossible question. I told the pupils that I honestly could not choose, because each had contributed so much, but it was fabulous that they knew about those wonderful women.

So, where are we today? We are getting there, but there is still long way to go in our fight for equality. It is, therefore, entirely fitting that a statue of Mary Barbour is being unveiled today in Glasgow. As we have heard, she led thousands of women through the streets of Govan to fight for fair rents during the 1915 rent strike and campaigned for women's access to reproductive and sexual health services. She was a social pioneer and an inspirational woman in the true sense.

The Scottish Government has a proud record of promoting women's equality, including measures such as ensuring greater pay transparency, increasing early learning and childcare provision to

record levels and working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to challenge pregnancy and maternity discrimination. We are also setting ambitious targets to increase the minority gender share in the most imbalanced college subject groups and modern apprentice frameworks, and we are improving women's representation on boards through the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill as well as through the women 50:50 campaign and other initiatives.

Today, we fight on to banish the gender pay gap, to gain equal access to the board room and to finalise equal pay claims. We fight on for an end to sexual harassment and bullying at work and for an end to violence against women. We fight on for rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender women, for free sanitary products and for much more. Those things should not have to be fought for, because they are our rights. In 2018, gender equality and respect should be givens, and we will not give up until that is achieved.

I would like us to celebrate all women—mums, grans, aunts, sisters and carers—who are an inspiration to someone somewhere. I would also like us to celebrate the many amazing women who work in the third sector, such as Dr Marsha Scott of Scottish Women's Aid and Karyn McCluskey, the chief executive of Community Justice Scotland, who have done and continue to do crucial work in protecting women and improving their lives. There are many more women in the third sector who deserve a shout out.

We should celebrate how far we have come, but we should know that there is much more to do, so that our daughters and granddaughters are shown the respect that they deserve and have the best possible future. Only then will our work and that of our pioneering sisters be done.

16:11

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):

Throughout my life, I have been inspired by a number of influential women, who have each helped to change the world in their own way. As I looked back at some of those women in the run-up to today's debate, it became clear that women have been defying the odds successfully and unapologetically for centuries. Today in Scotland, we women no longer face the barriers that women faced even 50 years ago, and undoubtedly the odds are not so much stacked against us. Of course, there are still challenges and barriers here and around the world, and there are ways in which women are objectified, abused or oppressed, some of which members have highlighted. However, in this country, we now have a generation of young girls who can see strong, independent and successful women as normal.

The Pulitzer prize-winning author, poet and teacher Gwendolyn Brooks taught me that we sometimes have to tell people things that they do not want to hear. As she put it,

"Truth tellers are not always palatable."

We have spent the last century successfully working to redress the gender balance in this country, which I welcome, but we must be careful that we do not press too far. An article in *The Times* this week raised a very pertinent issue that resonated strongly with me: it asked whether we should really be worried that more boys go into engineering and more girls become nurses. I believe that the answer is yes only if there are barriers that are preventing them from doing something different. It is the barriers that we must address.

I have a son who is a tree surgeon, a son who is a soldier, a son who is an engineer and a son who is an economist. I have a daughter who is a primary school teacher and a young daughter who tells me that she wants to get married and have children. Did I fail as a parent for not pushing them to break gender stereotypes? I do not believe so. Eleanor Roosevelt declared:

"Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you'll be criticized anyway. You'll be damned if you do, and damned if you don't."

By all means, we should encourage young girls to find their passion, and we should ensure that whatever the girl's ambition may be, she can achieve it. However, we must be careful not to push too far. If a young girl wants to keep house and be a mum, we should respect and applaud that choice, too.

Girls in Scotland are now 56 per cent more likely to apply for university than their male counterparts. Perhaps the cabinet secretary will join me in congratulating the University of Glasgow's school of medicine, which tweeted today that 16 per cent of its graduates in 1933 were female and that, in 2017, 71 per cent of its graduates were female. That, by any standards, is a phenomenal change and phenomenal progress for women.

I welcome, of course, the drive for girls to achieve academically, but I worry sometimes that we are no longer pursuing gender parity in this country and promotion of women's rights is in danger of coming to mean demotion of men. We have a responsibility to all our children and young people to be strong role models, male or female, and to encourage them to strive to achieve all that they can, irrespective of their gender. Women in Scotland have more freedom than ever to determine their own futures, and we should celebrate that.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Does Michelle Ballantyne agree that the launch of the

women in agriculture task force, headed by Joyce Campbell and Fergus Ewing, at the Royal Highland Show last June is a great way to highlight the important contribution that women make in agriculture?

Michelle Ballantyne: Absolutely. When women went to work on farms as the land girls during the war, they proved that they could do the job as well as men. That was the beginning of an enormous change for women. As I said, I want to see women being able to do whatever they want to do. It is about the barriers that we take down; all the actions that we take should be about removing barriers and allowing girls and boys to compete equally for whatever jobs they wish to do.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Michelle Ballantyne: I want to continue for a bit, but Monica Lennon can come back to me later.

On international women's day, we must turn our focus to the women who remain second-class citizens. The theme this year is to press for progress for them. Horrific cases of violence against women and abuse and persecution based on gender are still too common all around the world. Often, the women who are most at risk are also those who are already marginalised, so we should also be addressing issues beyond gender. In a number of cultures, the education and health of women are deemed to be inconsequential. For example, when I first trained in London, the husbands of many of our patients spoke for the women: they were not allowed to have a voice or to speak in our language about their issues. Women in some cultures are often further degraded by the violence and abuse that they receive.

It seemed radical when, in the 1960s, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia introduced public education for girls, but in just a few years even the most traditional Saudis were sending their daughters to school. New norms can and must be established. Religion and culture are often major factors preventing the establishment of women's rights. However, in an age of interconnectivity, where the majority of the population has immediate access to international events and ideas, it will be more and more difficult to stand in the way of a global shift towards equality.

Just last year in Saudi Arabia Mohammad bin Salman changed several laws to grant women more freedoms—freedoms that would in most countries be taken for granted. However, that change was acknowledgement that holding on to the ultratraditionalist culture was, in his words, “not normal”. It was a small step, but it is evidence of a large-scale systemic shift that is occurring globally.

The press for progress campaign will not topple the kingdoms or countries that reject equality for women, but it can help to add pressure and help the move to establish a global norm of gender parity. With each country that acknowledges gender equality, we get a step closer to a global community in which men and women are equal. There will come a time when it is no longer in the interests of a leader to deny gender equality, especially as men and women come to stand together on the issue. In her New Hampshire speech, which resonated around the globe, Michelle Obama made a point that Alex Cole-Hamilton also made strongly in his speech earlier:

“Strong men—men who are truly role models—don't need to put down women to make themselves feel powerful.”

The more the idea of equality spreads, the more difficult it will become to refute. Movements such as the time's up campaign have helped to fuel an international conversation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to stop you there, because your time is up.

Michelle Ballantyne: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was enjoying the speech, but I am sorry: you have had seven minutes and 40 seconds.

16:19

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Of course it is right to celebrate the milestones of the past, but I will use my speech to talk about the continuing violence against women around the world. Also, I will host an event on gender justice this evening.

In the first two months of 2018 alone, I have heard story after story of sexual harassment, domestic abuse, trafficking and prostitution. All those are just symptoms of the same problem: the objectifying and demeaning of women to facilitate violence, abuse and harassment.

The stories are deeply unsettling, as are the statistics. Globally, almost 40 per cent of all murders of women are committed by their male partners. In Scotland, just over half of female victims of homicides were killed by their partner or ex-partner. Telling such stories on a day like today is so important because until there is widespread acceptance of the problem nothing will change, and there will never be an anniversary commemorating the change. We do not want to be advocates forever; we want to celebrate change.

The same is true of trafficking of girls and women within and to Scotland. Many, although not all, are trafficked to work as prostitutes, and do not have the power to walk away and are at the mercy

of people who will use and abuse them as commercial property.

They are unsettling, but the stories are painfully true and are not just restricted to the big cities. A few days ago, it was reported that figures of suspected human trafficking in Scotland had shown a marked increase in 2017. Trafficking does not affect people only from other countries: it can take place in any community, which includes all our communities, no matter how rural or how far off the beaten track.

One of the busiest slave trafficking routes anywhere in the world is the trafficking of girls from Nepal to India for forced prostitution. An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 trafficked Nepali people are in India. Each of them has a face, a name and a home. Every year, about 10,000 Nepali women and girls are trafficked to India and attempts are made to traffic many more. However, only 350 cases of trafficking were actually registered with the police. I will say those figures again. Every year, about 10,000 Nepali women are trafficked and only 350 cases are reported.

A few weeks ago, I visited Nepal to see some of the anti-trafficking work that is being done through Children at Risk Network Nepal—CarNetNepal—which raises awareness among communities, empowers women and girls with skills and opportunities, and tries to improve the economic status of households that could otherwise be vulnerable to offers of trafficking. In a rural village, I met high school girls, all of whom were attending computing and tailoring classes so that they could earn a living and contribute to their household's income. They were bright girls, as earnest and giggly as teenage girls in Scotland, but they and their peers face grave risks of trafficking and have no choice in the matter.

After the earthquake in 2015, the numbers of trafficked women rose significantly because of the increase in poverty. In communities in Nepal, selling a woman is, today, a means of feeding a family. They are being sold by brothers, fathers and husbands. Some are saved. Deepika is a 17-year-old girl who was taken by her "brother" to the passport office to apply for a passport. The authorities had a few doubts about her reasons for applying, because when she was asked where she was going and why, she did not know. After a number of questions, the authorities discovered that the man with her was not her brother—he was there to send her abroad. He swiftly disappeared and Deepika was supported to go home after being counselled on the risks of trafficking and sexual exploitation. She had been under the impression that she was to be given a job in India that would contribute to the household income.

Not everybody is saved before it is too late. Last week, the International Justice Mission, which has

been the subject of a members' debate that was led by Gillian Martin, helped police to bust a trafficking network in India. It was based in a hotel, where girls and young women were being sold for sex through a secretive trafficking network of people who were making thousands from their abuse. Of the six victims, two were children. Almost 20 per cent of victims in private trafficking networks are children—young girls. Last year, four women were rescued in the same city. The youngest was 13 years old. They had been moved around constantly, and were being sold for sex in homes and apartments.

As we hold the debate, thousands more women are still in grotty hellholes, being bought and sold by anybody who has the cash to do so. They are particularly vulnerable because they are women and are at the mercy of the men in their lives, who will buy and sell them to feed other family members. Those women need our voices to shame inaction by the authorities, support the efforts of charities such as IJM and Tearfund and pray and hope for the day when women throughout the world are free from such abuse.

As a woman, it is my right not to be subjected to violence, domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation or honour-based violence. Until all women can claim that right, not just in Scotland but in every community of every country, there is a lot of work to do.

16:26

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I am proud to stand in solidarity with all the sisters on international women's day and to call myself a feminist. I say directly to men that it makes them no less a man to be a feminist, to recognise that gender inequality exists, to recognise and celebrate international women's day and to accept that everyday sexism is real and impacts on women in workplaces, campuses, playgrounds and elsewhere not only in Scotland but around the world. We have a duty to all sisters—all women throughout the world—to accept that fact, recognise it and campaign side by side with them on that important agenda.

We cannot leave any community to fight its battles on its own, because for every one of us who believes in equality in all its forms, it is a shared fight. We cannot leave women to be the voices fighting for gender equality, just as we cannot leave LGBT communities to be the ones to fight for LGBT rights and we cannot ask ethnic minority communities to be the ones to fight against racism. We cannot leave Jewish communities to fight anti-Semitism alone or leave Muslim communities to fight Islamophobia alone. Instead, all of us together, shoulder to shoulder, must take on those shared challenges so that we

can defeat prejudice, hate and inequality in all their forms and root them out of our society.

Other members have mentioned the historical context of the day. I am proud that, in Glasgow today, we unveiled the Mary Barbour statue. She was the first woman to be elected in the city and did much to help many people across her community—not just women—who were fighting for rent controls.

I am often asked, as I am sure every politician is, who inspired me to come into politics and who my role models are. People are often surprised when I say that my role model is my mother. People naturally expect me to say that it is my father and that I get my politics from him. In fact, I get my politics and my values from my mother. That is because, although she has never sought or stood for political office, she has faced up to racism and fascism throughout her life since arriving here as a four-year-old and then as the wife of someone who was trying to be elected as Britain's first Muslim MP. She has done it with a solidity and bravery that has been inspiring not only to me but to countless other people.

However, she has not stopped there. My mum now lives in Pakistan with my father. She is not there just being the wife of a politician somewhere else. She leads on an international project for women's empowerment through social enterprise. She runs 42 social enterprise units that help to create employment for young women, particularly from the most deprived communities. She helps to operate two hospitals that give free treatment to the poorest and most vulnerable women. One of those hospitals specialises in maternity care so that it can reduce the number of stillbirths and give support to women. She also helps to run a school, to guarantee education for local girls. She is an inspiration to me. I know that she is not watching today, because she is in Pakistan, but I send her a message of love and solidarity on international women's day, and I will make sure that I remember to send her a mother's day message on Sunday, too.

I have touched on the global challenges. The reality is that we fail to recognise that far too many women, in many parts of the world, still have no access to democracy. Too many girls still do not have access to basic education. Around the world, the right to go to school is a fight that we have still not won. Some still believe that education is for boys and not for girls. We still need to fight for that right.

There is also the right to access basic healthcare. We have talked, rightly, about ending period poverty in Scotland, but many women around the world do not have access even to basic healthcare. There are still employment barriers around the world, such as access to

employment—only in the past year have some countries begun to allow women to drive. There is the issue of the distribution of wealth among people, not just in this country but around the world. Another issue is the percentage of women who own property or land, or who own businesses that can help to grow their country's economy.

When I was a shadow international development minister in a different Parliament, among the most successful projects that I saw were microfinance projects led by women in some of the world's poorest countries. I asked some of those women and their families why they thought that microfinance was going into the hands of women rather than men in their society and I received two answers. First, they said that it was because it had been recognised that women have a voice and a role to play. Secondly, they said that if an investment is made in a woman, they make sure that the community benefits; there is no guarantee that that will happen if an investment is made in a man. That is very true. They did not say that as a joke, and I did not take it as a joke. Women have a sense of responsibility not just to themselves but to the wider society.

That reflects something that my grandfather always used to say. He was never particularly concerned where his sons went to university or what they studied. In fact, one of his sons dropped out of university, although he did not make a bad career for himself. Instead, my grandfather put most of his focus on ensuring that my aunt—his daughter—went to university, where she studied to be a doctor. She now serves our national health service here in Scotland as a general practitioner. I asked him once why he was so focused on his daughter's education and did not care about his sons' education. He said that the reason is that if we educate a man, we benefit one person, but if we educate a woman, we benefit a family. That is a fundamental principle that needs to be shared around the world.

The everyday sexism and sexual harassment campaign that has gripped the media in the past six months or more has, I hope, woken people up to the realities that women face every day. I would challenge any man, in this country or around the world, to reflect on those issues, and to think about their behaviour in everyday situations and the impact that it might have had on the women around them. I have reflected on my behaviour and I hope that every man does the same, so that we can ensure fairness, equality and justice for every woman. We have made progress, but my God we have got a lot more progress to make. I stand shoulder to shoulder with sisters in that project.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was hesitant to interrupt you when you were doing so well. We

have a few minutes in hand, so I can give Ms Lennon a generous six minutes to sum up for Labour.

16:33

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Thank you, Presiding Officer. I welcome the chance to close on behalf of Scottish Labour and to speak in support of my colleague Rhoda Grant's amendment.

There is indeed much that we can celebrate about on-going work to address women's inequality in Scotland. However, as well as being an opportunity for celebration, international women's day is an opportunity for women to organise and to highlight the work that still needs to be done.

The Government's motion acknowledges its on-going commitment and activity to tackle women's inequality. I commend Angela Constance for the leadership that she shows as cabinet secretary with responsibility for equalities.

I have been trying to think of a word to describe the debate, and maybe the word is magical. Sandra White's eyesight improved in the middle of her speech, so something special has happened here today. I think that there has been an emotional connection across the chamber. Although we are in different parties and have different views on some issues, a lot of the issues that we have discussed today really resonate with us and either affect us directly or affect people who we care about. I am really grateful to everyone for their contributions so far.

We have reflected on the achievements that we have seen here over the past few years, such as the passing of historic legislation in the form of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill, the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill and the criminalisation of revenge porn. Those are significant legislative leaps forward that will strengthen women's rights in Scotland. I commend the activists and parliamentarians alike who have been responsible for achieving those significant wins for women's equality.

Those victories are evidence of what can be achieved when women—and, more important, feminists and feminist women—are elected to positions of power. They are evidence of why I, like many others in the chamber, remain restless and impatient for further and faster progress on women's political representation. We know that the key to achieving change on many of those issues lies in ensuring that decision-making bodies are reflective of the society that they seek to represent. I am grateful to Alison Johnstone and others who are part of the women 50:50 campaign, which has really made a difference.

In reflecting on the debate, the progress that we have made so far and the progress that we have yet to make, it struck me that there are only so many times that we can repeat the same arguments and the same statistics and have the same debates over and over again. The statistics around women's representation have been rehashed many times in the chamber; they have been repeated by me on more than one occasion—and I have not been here that long. It is an unacceptable truth that women, especially women of colour, are underrepresented in our national Parliament—in fact, there has never been a woman of colour in this Parliament—our media, our public boards and our councils.

Why does that matter? It matters because we are still living in a society where violence against women is all too common and where one in three women who work in this building can say that they have experienced sexist behaviour and sexual harassment, as we read in the survey results that were published just last week. Most of us are not surprised at all by those findings. It matters because we still live in a society in which only a fraction of reported rapes are even prosecuted and an even smaller fraction of those result in a conviction. Claudia Beamish, who has had to leave the chamber, was right to highlight how the media reports such crimes, which are about not sex but violence against women and the abuse of power.

There have been some great speeches. I cannot mention them all, but I have already tweeted that Gail Ross's speech was outstanding. Gillian Martin made me cry, because the issues that she highlighted are very real. I do not want any woman to come into this workplace and feel unsafe—I do not want that for any woman in any part of Scotland or indeed beyond.

The spirit of Labour's amendment is to highlight the theme of this year's international women's day, which is to press for progress. To me, it feels like this year, on the back of the momentum from the me too campaign and the time's up movement, maybe people will wake up and we will see some real change.

Just last night, a well-known woman in politics, Mhairi Black, was telling it as it is—and good on her. She read out the violent, offensive and frightening abuse that is sent to her in a public forum—so why should she not repeat it in a public place, particularly our Parliament? Why should women in politics keep quiet about that?

On Twitter, I discovered that I had been described as the human equivalent of an anthrax-soaked razor wire tampon. How dare we as women fight to combat period poverty? I have been undeterred and I have worked with women across this chamber, including Gillian Martin, and

with Victoria Heaney from Women for Independence. We will not be silent on this issue. I am pleased to mark international women's day by saying that I have lodged a final proposal for a member's bill to establish legal rights that would give everyone who menstruates in Scotland the right to access free sanitary products. We have heard a lot today about injustices against women globally, but if we can get that right in Scotland we can help effect change across the world.

My time is almost up. Yes, there is a lot that we can celebrate on international women's day, but there is still so much more that we have to do. It feels like the spirit of Mary Barbour and her army is with us in the chamber today. Rhoda Grant said that we want to be respected. Gail Ross said that lip service will not do. Rona Mackay said that we will not give up. Anas Sarwar and Alex Cole-Hamilton are a couple of the men who have committed to our cause, too.

That just leaves me to say happy international women's day to everyone.

16:40

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to continue the consensus that has been the hallmark of the debate. As we celebrate more than 100 years of international women's day, I feel a deep sense of pride in looking around the chamber and taking in the success of so many women, as was also noted by Clare Haughey.

Although today is, of course, a day for celebrating our achievements, it is our obligation to ensure that we do not become complacent and, instead, push ahead to make even greater strides in the next 100 years to guarantee the true equality and empowerment of women.

We have heard excellent contributions from across the chamber. In her opening speech, Angela Constance spoke about equality for women and girls, and what matters to our children today. I feel that that cause is one with which surely few people could disagree. Parliament is united in support of protecting and upholding the rights of women and girls in Scotland's year of young people.

We have acknowledged the role that is played by organisations such as Girlguiding Scotland, Young Scot and YWCA Scotland, to name but a few. Those voluntary groups play their part in helping girls to realise their potential and build their confidence to prove that not only are they every bit as good as men, but that they can strive to surpass them and become leaders in their field, whether that is business, science, the arts or, of course, politics.

In 2018, it is unbelievable that there is an on-going need for women to push every day on causes such as closing the gender pay gap, encouraging more women into public life and standing up for women who suffer from harassment and abuse and continue to call out everyday sexism. A few months ago, all eyes were on the red carpet at the Golden Globes, as actors wore all black in a show of solidarity with victims of sexual harassment.

Rhoda Grant spoke passionately this afternoon about the devastating effects of domestic abuse.

There are obviously still barriers to overcome—and yes, glass ceilings still need to be broken. However, from those on the red carpet down to each and every female, we all want progress to be made, and it is becoming more apparent that women are definitely uniting and becoming active in women's equality. That work is aided by social media campaigns such as #MeToo and time's up.

I would like to honour the press for progress campaign, which Christina McKelvie and others mentioned earlier. The campaign is uniting women all over the world in the pursuit of gender equality. The movement aims to challenge stereotypes, celebrate women's achievements and lobby for greater gender parity. If no immediate action is taken and concerted effort is not made to include women at all levels of the economy, gender pay parity will not be achieved for another 200 years, as we have heard from Alison Johnstone and others. That is quite incredible.

A recent report from the World Economic Forum found that there is a direct link between gender parity and the success of an economy. That illustrates that closing the gender pay gap is not only good for women but good for society as a whole. We need to promote that message in the chamber and in our communities, because women's rights matter to all of us.

On a positive and indeed pertinent note, the WEF data also shows that, when women are more present and participate in leadership roles, more women are hired at all levels, right across the board. That detail holds true even when we take into consideration the disparities in the size of female talent pools across various industry sectors.

Different political parties might have different ideas on how to close the gap in representation, but we all acknowledge that elected office is an area in which women continue to be underrepresented. We can differ on how we get there, but not on the need for more women to stand for elected roles, whether in councils or in the Scottish and UK Parliaments.

Last year, my party launched Women2Win, which aims to promote the brightest and best in

the party. I would like to acknowledge the role that Annie Wells and others have played in pushing forward the agenda for Women2Win Scotland. We heard earlier from Maurice Corry about the launch of the new commission within my party.

As part of the Scottish Government's programme of themed years, 2018 is the year of young people. It is good that young people are being celebrated. This year of young people gives young girls the opportunity to celebrate their achievements and contribution to communities, and the opportunity

“to shine locally, nationally and globally”,

as is recognised in the motion today.

We heard from my colleague Margaret Mitchell about women's attainment in the legal profession, and others spoke about STEM subjects. I agree that much progress has been made, but there is still much work to do. It is true that, over the past few years, the number of passes by girls in STEM subjects at school has increased not only in higher qualifications in maths and computing but in chemistry and physics. Nevertheless, I believe that all of us in the chamber recognise that gender stereotyping is still discouraging girls from taking STEM subjects at school and aspiring to STEM careers. I strongly believe that our recognition of that fact is the first step towards correcting that and seeing the numbers of girls in STEM subjects steadily increase, not only at school but at college and university.

Presiding Officer—sorry, Deputy Presiding Officer; that was a promotion—many good points have been made from across the chamber this afternoon, and I recognise that all the speakers in this debate have made very valid and useful contributions. As a mother, I found it very touching to hear Anas Sarwar talk about his mum and how inspirational she was. I hope that my son will in future speak of me in terms that are even slightly glowing.

I am excited to work with everyone in this chamber to advance real gender equality, respect for women and the uplifting of women in politics. I appreciate the opportunity that international women's day has provided for discussing these important issues on this public platform, and I welcome all input into solving them. Working together we can realise the potential of women in Scotland and improve the lives of all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was just thinking that Mr Sarwar has caused a lot of problems for my sons as well.

I ask Maree Todd to close for the Government. Minister, you have until 5 o'clock.

16:47

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Maree Todd): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am delighted to have gained a bit of extra time for my closing remarks, because, as you can imagine, I have plenty to say on the topic.

Given the focus this year on young women and girls, I am absolutely delighted to be closing today's international women's day debate. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be able to do this job and to have the opportunity, almost every day, to say to young women, “If I can do it, you can do it. You can dream big, aim high and go for it.”

I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate. It is clear that across the chamber we are united in wanting to achieve gender parity. We want to see action taken, both here and abroad, to ensure that women are treated equally and fairly in the workplace, in the home and in society—it is clear that that is what we all want for future generations.

As we have heard, 2018 is Scotland's year of young people. I highlight the uniqueness of this themed year: it is the first to recognise people as one of Scotland's greatest assets, and Scotland is the first country in the world that we know of to dedicate a full year to celebrating young people. It is a unique opportunity to show our young people how valued they are and how proud Scotland is of all that they do and all that they can achieve in the future.

The year takes an innovative approach, and it is only right to welcome its entire ethos, in that it has been developed by young people, for young people. Activities throughout the year will focus on celebrating the achievements of our young people and recognising the contribution that they make to communities all across Scotland. In return, we need to ensure that we are creating opportunities for their voices to be heard and, most important, listened to. Children and young people should be at the heart of decisions that affect them. That is their right, as set out in article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It is also central to the ethos of the year of young people.

To ensure continuity throughout the year, a group of young people—communic18—has been recruited. The group is supported by Young Scot and its role is to champion the values of co-design and ensure that young people's voices are heard and acted on across the activities for the year.

We want to ensure that all our young people feel and believe that they are valued, wanted and vital to our country's future. This Government is committed to giving young people a stronger voice in policy making and co-designing improvements

to services that affect their lives. In doing so, and by changing perceptions of young people and changing the country's relationship with our young people, it is our aspiration to create a lasting legacy, beyond 2018.

I will respond to some of the points that have been raised during the debate. To Annie Wells, I say that there is definitely no room for complacency about the gender pay gap, but the gap is narrower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK and we are taking decisive action where we have the powers to do so.

We also have a slightly higher female employment rate in Scotland than the rest of the UK, and I hardly need to mention the transformative potential of our expansion of early learning and childcare, which will undoubtedly enable many more mothers to work. Because of our commitment to the living wage, the largely female workforce will get a well-deserved pay rise, too.

To Rhoda Grant, I say that my colleague Angela Constance intervened earlier to highlight the issues to do with universal credit. I have spoken passionately about the issue, because, like Rhoda Grant, I represent an area where universal credit was trialled and has operated in practice for many years. I would welcome all parties' support in tackling that devastating policy at source—at Westminster.

On domestic abuse, the Scottish Government has committed to providing additional funding to train 14,000 officers and staff. That dedicated funding will enable Police Scotland to train officers to identify the new offence. Scottish Women's Aid will also receive funding to develop training to help communities to understand the legislation.

Let me respond to Alex Cole-Hamilton in a slightly teasing fashion. I am not sure that I understood him correctly, but I do not want him to mansplain. Did I hear him offer to stand down at the next election to ensure that a woman can have his seat? Perhaps his words were intended for some of his colleagues, but not for himself.

Let me respond to Michelle Ballantyne by quoting Christina McKelvie's words—right back at you, as they say on social media. She said that men of quality should not fear equality. I would love to see the day when there is no such thing as a boy's job or a girl's job. I am keen to attract young—and older—men into early years careers. We do not want to undervalue the work that women traditionally do, and we do not want to corral anyone into any job. Of course people should be able to freely choose their path in life.

However, Michelle Ballantyne will have heard the murmurings around the chamber, including from members who tried to intervene during her

speech. I think that she underacknowledged the barriers that we face, not least the lack of role models and the cultural conditioning, which led me, a person who was an absolute science geek as a youngster and who has highers in physics, maths, biology and chemistry, never once to consider a career in engineering but to train as a health professional, albeit that I absolutely loved my career.

Michelle Ballantyne: The point that I made strongly was that it is the barriers that we need to address. It is not about gender; it is about the barriers. I do not know what the barriers were in the minister's case—her teachers, her parents or whatever—but there were barriers, because she had the capability to do it, and that is what is important. It is the barriers that we need to address.

Maree Todd: Again, I ask Michelle Ballantyne to reflect on the murmurings that her comments are causing around the chamber. There is clearly something in what she is saying that is out of step with many other women in the chamber.

I thoroughly enjoyed hearing many women and men in the chamber talking about some of the strong and powerful women in Scotland's history, including Mary Barbour, whose statue was unveiled today. Both Gillian Martin and Rona Mackay talked about those historical women being written out of history. I make a wee plea for the rioting women from all over the Highlands who were absolutely integral in resisting landowners' moves to clear them off the land. I learned when I was growing up that the women of Coigach, just north of where I grew up, not only stripped the sheriff officer who came to clear them off the land of the summonses that he had brought with him, but stripped him of his clothes and sent him packing in the boat that he arrived in. I look forward to seeing that commemorated as part of the herstory project that was mentioned.

A number of members spoke about sexual harassment. Sexual harassment or abuse in any form, whether in the workplace, in the home or in society, is completely reprehensible and must stop. Everyone has the right to live their life free from abuse, harassment and intimidation, and I encourage anyone who has experienced those things to report it. We must tackle the underlying attitudes and inequalities as well as the culture that perpetuates that behaviour. Every workplace, whether it is a political party or a Parliament, must have robust processes for reporting and dealing with harassment and bullying, and should be fair, sensitive and supportive to all parties involved. The problem of harassment is not specific to any one institution, and it is the responsibility of all of us in society and all of us as individuals to take action.

This could be a watershed moment when we see real societal change in the treatment of women, but we need to seize that opportunity for change. We heard an incredibly powerful contribution from Gillian Martin, who talked about the insidious, sustained, thinly veiled sexual comments that women suffer. Like her, I salute the women who were brave enough in the past year to speak up and make a difference for all of us. I commend to the Parliament the poem “Spartaca” by Pippa Little, which I tweeted today. I am going to quote directly from it: I am proud to stand together with all the other “humourless bitches” who do not tolerate banter either.

I move on to sport. The Girlguiding survey that a number of members talked about and which the cabinet secretary referred to highlights the positive impact of sport, with girls saying that it helps them to be healthier and to feel more confident and positive. The Scottish Government is encouraging more women and girls to take up sport through our £300,000 sporting equality fund, and we have established a women and girls in sport advisory group to shape future action.

It was great to hear Alison Johnstone talk about some of her sporting heroines, and I am delighted that the advisory group includes one of my sporting heroines, Dee Bradbury, who came from Alison Johnstone’s sport of athletics into my sport of rugby and is still forging a pioneering path. She will become the first female president of the Scottish Rugby Union and the first female tier 1 nation president later this year.

Our plan to nearly double funded early learning and childcare entitlement for all three and four-year olds and some two-year-olds will make a vital contribution to our priorities to grow our economy, tackle inequality and close the attainment gap.

Before I move on to my concluding remarks, I thank all the organisations that do a fantastic job supporting children and young people in Scotland in one way or another—YWCA Scotland, Girlguiding Scotland, Young Scot, Children in Scotland, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children’s Parliament to name but a few. I also thank our delivery partners for the year of young people, which include, in addition to those already mentioned, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, sportscotland, Creative Scotland and Visit Scotland. I give a special mention and thanks to communicat18, the group of young people who are co-designing year of young people activity.

One of my favourite writers is the Nigerian author of “Half of a Yellow Sun” and “Americanah”, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She said:

“Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change. But I am also hopeful,

because I believe deeply in the ability of human beings to remake themselves for the better.”

One hundred years after some women got the right to vote, we have acknowledged this afternoon that, although there have been considerable advances in women’s rights, gender equality still eludes us. However, we have also reaffirmed our commitment to remaking our society for the better, and to creating a fairer and more equal Scotland in which young women and girls do not anticipate, as inevitable, sexual harassment or being paid less than their male counterparts. I believe that we will get there. There is an energy at the moment, and I have met and spoken to too many of Scotland’s young women and girls to think otherwise. Their message is clear: enough is enough. The time is now.

I finish with a quote by Barack Obama, a proud feminist. He said:

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-10839 to S5M-10842, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S5M-10901, on a committee meeting.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Continuing Care (Scotland) Amendment Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (Consequential and Supplemental Provisions) Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Authorities subject to the Socio-economic Inequality Duty) (Scotland) Regulations 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Searches under Part 5: Constables in Scotland: Code of Practice) Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Local Government and Communities Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 1.15pm to 2.00pm on 14 March 2018 for the purpose of consideration of the Planning (Scotland) Bill.—[Joe FitzPatrick]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-10851.1, in the name of Annie Wells, which seeks to amend motion S5M-10851, in the name of Angela Constance, on international women's day, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-10851.2, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Angela Constance, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-10851, in the name of Angela Constance, on international women's day, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament unites on International Women's Day to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls, which are fundamental human rights; welcomes Scotland's Year of Young People 2018, which aims to inspire Scotland through its young people, celebrating their achievements, valuing their contribution to communities and creating new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and globally; notes that more girls are studying STEM subjects and law but more must be done to retain and promote women, as men still dominate these fields at senior levels; welcomes the work of the UK Government to address issues such as the gender pay gap; further welcomes the opportunity to reflect on young women and girls' experience of gender inequality and what they would like to see change in the future; notes the Scottish Government's commitment and ongoing activity to tackle gender inequality; pays tribute to the many and valued contributions of young women and girls, in Scotland, across the UK and around the world, who are advocating for, and in some cases making, change towards gender parity in their communities; acknowledges organisations, such as Girlguiding Scotland, Young Scot and YWCA Scotland – the Young Women's Movement, which play a vital role in ensuring that the voices of young women and girls are heard and acted on, and notes that the theme of this International Women's Day is Press for Progress and, in this vein, presses for progress on the elimination of violence against women, closing the gender pay gap, ending period poverty and, for once and for all, smashing the glass ceiling that prevents women achieving their full potential.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to put a single question on the five Parliamentary Bureau motions. There being no objections, the question is, that motions S5M-10839 to S5M-10842 and motion S5M-10901, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Continuing Care

(Scotland) Amendment Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

Meeting closed at 17:02.

That the Parliament agrees that the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (Consequential and Supplemental Provisions) Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Authorities subject to the Socio-economic Inequality Duty) (Scotland) Regulations 2018 [draft] be approved.

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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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