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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 4 March 2021

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:30]

First Minister's Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business today is First Minister's question time. Before we turn to questions, I invite the First Minister to update the Parliament on the situation with Covid.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will give a very quick update on today's statistics.

Yesterday, 500 new cases were reported, which was 2.5 per cent of all the tests that were carried out. The total number of confirmed cases is now 204,055. Some 726 people are in hospital, which is 24 fewer than yesterday, and 69 people are in intensive care, which is one fewer than yesterday.

I regret to report that, in the past 24 hours, a further 24 deaths were registered. In addition, three other deaths that were registered recently but were not yet included in the published total have been added. Those three deaths together with the 24 that were registered yesterday mean that the total number of people who have, sadly, died is now 7,398 under that daily measurement. Once again, I send my deepest condolences to all those who have lost a loved one.

We will publish the latest estimate of the R number later today. We expect it to show again that the R number is below 1. That reflects the positive trends that we can all see in the daily figures right now.

I will give a quick update on the vaccination programme. As of 8.30 this morning, 1,688,808 people had received their first dose of the vaccine, which is an increase of 26,729 since yesterday. In addition, 100,058 people have also now received their second dose, which is an increase of 7,508 since yesterday. That means that 34,237 people in total received vaccinations yesterday. Ninety-five per cent of 65 to 69-year-olds have now had a first dose, as have 37 per cent of 60 to 64-year-olds, 31 per cent of 55 to 59-year-olds, and 26 per cent of 50 to 54-year-olds. That age group is of particular interest to me. We still expect to be able to offer first doses to everyone over 50, all unpaid carers and all adults with an underlying health condition by mid-April.

Taking into account all of what I have just reported, I think that there is little doubt that things are firmly heading in the right direction at the

moment. The number of cases is falling, the numbers in hospital are falling and the vaccination programme is progressing extremely well. That is why we have been able to set out the timetable for children's return to school. Next week, I will outline any further changes that we feel we can make at this stage to the level 4 restrictions. In the following week, I will provide more information about the timetable for easing restrictions after 26 April.

There is much to feel optimistic about right now, but I stress that that should not see us throw caution to the wind. Case numbers remain high and, of course, the new variant remains highly infectious. If we want to continue the progress, my advice to everyone is to continue to abide by the stay-at-home rule for the moment. Stay at home except for essential purposes, follow FACTS when you are out, and make sure that, collectively, we continue to keep everything going in the right direction. I thank everybody who is doing that and sticking with it during these difficult times.

Judicial Review (Legal Advice)

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): I want to ask the First Minister about the legal advice in the Salmond inquiry. Despite the Parliament voting for that to be released four months ago, it was only partially revealed this week.

Section 2.30 of the ministerial code makes it clear that ministers must act lawfully, informed of the legal considerations, and that

"the legal implications of any course of action are considered at the earliest opportunity."

That part—acting early on the legal implications—is important.

Let us go through the timeline. Nine weeks before conceding the judicial review, legal advice stated that the case was more likely to fail than succeed. The First Minister chose to go forward. A month before the Government conceded, legal advice said that the least-worst option was to stop, or

"expenses will be far higher".

The First Minister chose the worst option. Nineteen days before the Government conceded, the Lord Advocate and Government and external lawyers all said that the case was not even stutable, which was the minimum requirement. The First Minister dug her heels in. Will she tell us why the Government tried for so long to defend what her own legal counsel called "the indefensible"?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As anybody who paid any attention to the lengthy proceedings yesterday, which clearly does not

include Ruth Davidson, will have seen, that is simply not true.

On 11 December, the law officers were very clear. The information on that has been published, and the quote from the law officers that was summarised in the note that was published in advance of yesterday was that there was “no question” that the case should be dropped; on the contrary, there were

“credible arguments to make across the petition”,

including on the issue of the appointment of the investigating officer. That was the position of the law officers.

Things started to go seriously wrong in the case in the days that followed. Due process was followed and that led to a decision by the Government to concede the case.

That is there for anyone with an open mind to look at. I think that the Deputy First Minister has undertaken to provide some further information to the committee, which will happen, and Parliament can look at that.

I answered questions on this for eight hours yesterday. I answered every question that was put to me. I intend to rest on that now and to allow both the committee and the inquiry on the ministerial code to conclude their work. In the meantime, I will get on with the job that I suspect most people watching now at home want me to get on with, which is leading the country through and out of a pandemic. I will leave Ruth Davidson and the Conservatives to play the political games that they seem to prioritise over everything else.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister characterises this as “political games”, but I have never forgotten the women at the heart of the inquiry, who were failed. The First Minister cannot get away from the fact that it was her Government that failed them and that questions still require to be answered.

Whether the Government ignored legal advice and cost taxpayers money is not up for question. What is being argued is how long they ignored advice for and how much money was wasted. That is what is truly incredible. The view of legal counsel was

“based on the facts as then known”.

The Government did not even give its own lawyers the facts. Advocates Roddy Dunlop and Christine O'Neill stated:

“We have each experienced extreme professional embarrassment.”

On instruction, they made plainly and demonstrably untrue statements before a judge. Documents that were highly relevant, yet undisclosed, were withheld from those queen's

counsel. They called that “unexplained and frankly inexplicable”. They refused to

“rehearse the regrettable way in which the document disclosure has unfolded”,

so I will ask the First Minister to rehearse it for us now. Will she confirm that the withheld documents were precisely the ones that made the case unstatable?

The First Minister: First, I will agree with something that Ruth Davidson said. I agree that she has not forgotten the women at the heart of this, because I do not think that Ruth Davidson ever remembered the women at the heart of this.

The legal advice is there for everyone to see. People with open minds, which does not include Ruth Davidson, can look at that. Ruth Davidson says that she is not playing political games. I beg to differ. I think that we saw the true colours of the Conservatives yesterday.

I do not know whether Ruth Davidson approved the comment or not, but on Tuesday night the Conservatives more or less said that it did not matter what I said before the parliamentary committee yesterday because they had already made up their minds. It is not about due process: it is political desperation on the part of the Conservatives.

We also had a glimpse yesterday of some of the values at play within the Conservatives. During that committee session, one of the Tory members seemed to be suggesting that I should have intervened in the process to effectively sweep the allegations against Mr Salmond under the carpet. Then the other Conservative member asked me to apologise for the inappropriate behaviour of a man. There we have the Tories demonstrating, without any help from me, that they are playing political games. While they do that, I say again that I gave eight hours of evidence at the committee and it is time to allow the committee and the independent inquiry into the ministerial code to do their jobs. In the meantime, I am going to get on with my job of leading the country through Covid and out of lockdown.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister cannot get away from the fact that the chamber is an organ of the Parliament and the chamber saw the legal advice that the chamber voted for four months ago only this week. We have every right to question a First Minister, who is the head of a Government and who failed those two women. I want everyone to understand how incompetent and secretive the Government is.

Legal counsel were provided with one email in a chain. It was a crucial element of their defence. However, they were not given the next email, which was sent less than half an hour later, in the

same chain; it was withheld. When it was finally handed over, it was one of the final straws and the First Minister's lawyers had to threaten to resign to force the Government's hand. That information was available the whole time. The Government could have passed it to its lawyers in September or October or November, but it withheld it and kept it secret. That cost the legal team months and all of us £0.5 million of taxpayers money. Why was the crucial evidence withheld for months from the Government's own legal team?

The First Minister: The case ultimately collapsed because information came to light. I set that out in the committee yesterday, and people can judge by looking at the advice that was published themselves. Of course, the committee will come to its conclusions, as will the independent inquiry on the ministerial code. I await the findings of both.

Again, I want to strike a note of consensus, because I believe in the importance of this democratic institution. By the time I sit down after this session of First Minister's questions today, I will have been subjected—rightly and properly—to 10 hours of parliamentary scrutiny this week. That is me doing my job and discharging my responsibilities. However, I gently point out to Ruth Davidson that this democratic institution that she extols the virtues of is the same democratic institution that she is about to leave to take up a seat in the unelected House of Lords. People across this country are becoming heartily sick of the soon-to-be Baroness Davidson lecturing anybody else on democracy.

Ruth Davidson: Because of the legal advice that had to be dragged from the Government under the threat of a vote of no confidence, we know that, for weeks, the Government was definitively and beyond any doubt ignoring legal advice. The case only became unstateable so late because the Government withheld crucial documents for so long. It withheld documents from its own lawyers. It withheld documents from the courts. It continues to withhold documents from Parliament.

What we have already seen shows that there is no argument that the Government ignored legal advice; it did. The argument is about whether it did so for three weeks or more than three months. There is no argument that the First Minister was at fault for losing more than £0.5 million of taxpayers' money; the argument is only about how much she is to blame for it. There is no argument that Nicola Sturgeon broke the ministerial code; the argument is only about how badly she broke it.

We believe that the sanction is for her to go—why doesn't she?

The First Minister: Ruth Davidson and the Conservatives have just shown their true colours all over again. She stands up here and says that scrutiny, democracy and due process are really important but, just as on Tuesday night, when the Conservatives prejudged my evidence to the parliamentary inquiry, she has just prejudged the outcome of the independent inquiry into the ministerial code.

This is just about desperate political games for the Conservatives. I suspect that their private polling is even more desperate than the public polling right now. We should remember that the people of Scotland have been voting no confidence in the Conservatives since the 1950s and I think that we are about to see why.

I will get on with my job. I will let the inquiries do their jobs. I have not prejudged them; Ruth Davidson clearly has.

In a few weeks, I will also subject myself to the ultimate scrutiny: the scrutiny and the verdict of the people of Scotland, which is the verdict that matters most. As I do so, Ruth Davidson will be slinking off to the House of Lords.

Legal Advice (Publication)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I offer my condolences to all the families impacted by Covid-19, particularly those that have lost a loved one.

The exchanges that we have just heard represent the worst of our politics. Each day, every one of us comes into the chamber and sits in front of that mace, which is inscribed with the ideals of the Parliament: wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity—principles that have been undermined when the Government failed the women who submitted claims of harassment; undermined by the Government's refusal to hand over all documentation to the committee that is investigating those failures; and undermined by the Government ignoring two votes by this Parliament calling for all the legal advice to be published.

The Government keeps telling us that it has nothing to hide, but when the Parliament twice demanded that the legal advice be published, it refused. When the advice was finally released, it was partial and came just hours before the First Minister's committee appearance. Wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity. First Minister, why did it take the threat of a no-confidence vote in the Deputy First Minister for your Government to act?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The importance for all Governments of being able to take proper legal advice should be understood by everybody across the chamber. The Government has now—rightly, given the allegations that have

been levelled at it—published that legal advice and people can look at it and draw their own conclusions. I say again that I sat in front of a parliamentary committee for eight hours, as is my duty and obligation. I am not sure whether any other member of this chamber has done likewise. I answered questions that were put to me and put the case of the Government. I also apologised, as I will again, to the women who were let down by the mistake that the Government made.

It is now right and proper—in line with the principles on that mace, which I, like all of us, hold dear—that we allow the inquiry to do its work, allow the independent inquiry into the ministerial code to do its work and allow me to get on with the job that I believe the majority of the country wants me to focus on now, which is to continue to steer the country through a global pandemic so that we can get through Covid, come out of lockdown and get back to normality. That is what I intend to focus on, while those inquiries conclude their work.

Anas Sarwar: That answer would have more credibility if all the legal advice had been published before the First Minister gave evidence, not after she gave evidence. The First Minister rightly had the opportunity to address the committee yesterday. I agree with her that it is important that all parties are given due process and that we do not prejudice the outcome of the inquiry.

With that in mind, in the coming weeks, James Hamilton QC will present his report on potential breaches of the ministerial code to the Government. The outcome of that report will be crucial in establishing the facts about what happened. The wholly unacceptable and disgraceful situation that we have had with the legal advice must not be repeated with the Hamilton report. Will the First Minister give the people of Scotland a cast-iron guarantee that the Government will release the report, without delay or obstruction, on the day that it is handed over by James Hamilton QC?

The First Minister: Yes.

Anas Sarwar: I welcome that commitment from the First Minister, but remember this: we will hold her to that promise. The First Minister is right that it is about transparency, so there can be no delay in publishing that report.

The ministerial code exists to uphold standards in public life. It is there to protect the integrity of the office of the First Minister, of all Scottish ministers and the whole of the Scottish Government. In her foreword to the ministerial code, the First Minister says:

“I will lead by example in following the letter and spirit of this Code, and I expect that Ministers and civil servants will do likewise.”

Wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity. In that light, does the First Minister agree, removing party and personality, that any minister who is found in breach of the ministerial code should resign?

The First Minister: I will uphold my words in the foreword to the ministerial code. I will uphold the principles on the mace. However, I will also demand the right to due process, which at least one party in the chamber is not prepared to give me.

Let us wait and see what the outcome is of the inquiries. They will be published, and then we can debate the outcome. I sat before the committee and I answered every question; I will now give the committee and the inquiry the opportunity to do their work.

Coronavirus (New Variants)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I put on record my congratulations to Anas Sarwar on his election as leader of the Scottish Labour Party. I welcome him to his role at First Minister’s question time.

The Greens want to see both inquiries completed. However, in the meantime, we are still focused on the public health crisis, which I think is what most members of the public want of us. This week, we mark a year since the first Covid-19 case was recorded in Scotland. Since then, more than 9,500 deaths have been documented by the National Records of Scotland. Every single one of us shares the expression of condolence to all the people who have been affected by that tragic loss.

A year on from the first case, we are faced with a new threat in the form of the so-called Brazilian variant, which has already been identified in Scotland and England. The strain has also been identified in 15 non-red-list countries, showing that the United Kingdom Government’s approach to quarantine is dangerously inadequate. It has been reported that the effort to trace contacts who might have been exposed to the new variant has been hampered by the provision of incomplete data. It is clear that the current approach to international travel, including via connections in the UK, is not yet enough to keep us safe as the virus continues to change. What further action is the Scottish Government planning to ensure that we protect the public from the importation of new forms of the virus?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We continue to think that international travel restrictions are essential. The travel restrictions that we have in place are more stringent than in other parts of the UK. We have a concern, which I have articulated on numerous occasions, that that difference leaves weaknesses in our defence

against importation of the virus. We will continue to work with the UK Government to try to fill the gaps and encourage a more uniform position.

We will also continue to do everything that we can to ensure that protections at our borders are as strict as they need to be, because it is absolutely the case that, as we suppress the virus here at home and vaccinate more people, the key risk that we face is new variants coming into the country that could potentially undermine the efficacy of the vaccine. That is one of our most serious challenges and will be one of our top priorities in the weeks to come.

Patrick Harvie: In addition to the reports of incomplete contact tracing data in Scotland, there are reports of a lost case in England. It is likely that the variant is present in other countries, but has not been identified yet. Therefore, the ongoing importance of our test, trace and isolate systems cannot be overstated. They will continue to be vital even as the vaccine programme is delivered at pace.

In the face of new variants, it is more important than ever that anyone who develops symptoms—not just new arrivals—is able to access a test and is supported to immediately self-isolate. Following pressure from the Greens, the self-isolation grant is being expanded, but we have repeatedly asked the Scottish Government and the First Minister about the provision of accommodation for people who need to self-isolate.

Freedom of information responses show that, in the 10 months up to mid-January, only seven people from three local authority areas were provided with hotel accommodation to self-isolate. Will the First Minister confirm whether there has been any progress on that or whether that form of support is still close to non-existent? It would be tragic if we allowed new variants to spread simply because people faced barriers to doing the right thing.

The First Minister: That support is there if people need it. Local authorities have that ability, and work is done to identify the needs of people who are asked to self-isolate, which can include accommodation, if necessary. I will certainly take steps to see whether there is more that we can do to promote awareness of that, so that people know that support is available. Patrick Harvie is right that we should take care to ensure that we are not risking the spread of the virus through the lack of availability of the support that people need to self-isolate. We take that seriously.

As we go into the next phase and, hopefully, cases fall, we can start to come out of lockdown and vaccination will continue to do its job. Importation and the risk of outbreaks will remain the key threats that we face. Test and protect and

self-isolation will come back to the fore as the key weapons in our arsenal to keep Covid at bay. Patrick Harvie is right to raise those issues, and the Government will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that all of that is available.

Open Government

4. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I warmly welcome Anas Sarwar to his place in the chamber.

There may have been eight hours of questioning yesterday, but there are still areas of outstanding concern: forgetting about a meeting, having a different recollection of another meeting, keeping meetings from the permanent secretary and not acting swiftly on a claimed leak of a complainer's name. However, the First Minister is right that it is for the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints and for the independent investigator to untangle these matters.

There is, however, one lesson that we should all be able to learn today. It should not take a threat to the job of the Deputy First Minister before the Government complies with the will of the Parliament to release the legal advice that it voted to have released months ago. Those who worked for decades to establish the Scottish Parliament did not do so for that to be flouted by a belligerent and secretive 14-year-old Government that is more interested in defending itself than in aiding the process of democracy. Why can the First Minister not see that that needs to change?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am afraid that I will have to agree to disagree with Willie Rennie in some ways. After the parliamentary votes, the Deputy First Minister had a process of discussion with the committee, which led to the committee having access to summaries of the legal advice that the Government had had. Earlier this week, that advice was published.

There is a really important principle underpinning the need for Governments to be able to take proper legal advice and for maintaining the confidentiality of that advice. Governments throughout the United Kingdom and indeed much of the world rely on that principle, too. There are many lessons to be learned here—I do not dispute that—but we must learn the lessons in the round, and the Parliament has a role to play in ensuring that some of the principles that are in place for the good governance that any Administration in the future will need are properly respected and given their place.

Willie Rennie: I am disappointed at the First Minister's digging in on this matter. It has been two weeks since the Parliament voted for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development's education report to be published. The First Minister said that we should judge her on her record on education, but that cannot be done if such an important report is hidden from the voters at the election. The Government has the report, but the Deputy First Minister has still not released it. Do we have to threaten another motion of no confidence in John Swinney to force him to respect the will of the Parliament?

The First Minister: It seems that the Opposition wants to pick and choose the principles that it wants us to abide by. There is a really important reason why Governments must have the ability to take confidential legal advice, but Willie Rennie is now also asking us to dictate to an independent organisation, the OECD no less, what the timetable for the publication of a report that it has been asked to produce should be. I am pretty certain that, if we were to do that, Willie Rennie would be one of the first members to get to his feet in the chamber to say how outrageous it was that we were intervening in an independent process that we had asked the OECD to undertake.

There are a range of principles here that Governments must abide by, and we will continue to do that in the overall interests of the good governance of the country. Thankfully, perhaps, the people of Scotland will get the opportunity in a few weeks' time to cast their verdict on all this. Then, all of us who are participating in this session—with one exception, of course—will put ourselves before the Scottish people, and the Scottish people can have their say and make their verdict. That, of course, is the verdict that we should all respect and abide by.

United Kingdom Budget

5. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the United Kingdom budget. (S5F-04877)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yesterday's delayed budget confirmed additional net funding of £1.175 billion to the Scottish budget, which is welcome. The majority of that has already been factored into our budget proposals, which are currently under consideration by the Parliament.

We welcome some of the individual announcements—the extension of the furlough scheme and self-employed support—but the Chancellor of the Exchequer's business support measures are significantly less generous than those that the Government proposes. Notably, there is little further funding to support health recovery or any significant new help for families in need. The confirmation that the levelling-up fund will indeed undermine the devolution settlement is particularly unwelcome. Nevertheless, we will work

with those implications to build—I hope—consensus in the chamber for our budget bill in the coming days.

John Mason: The Trades Union Congress has said that the chancellor

“is gambling with the recovery.”

More specifically, our capital budget has been cut and was not restored yesterday. Can the First Minister say anything about that? It seems to me that capital investment—housing and other things—both creates jobs and gives us assets.

The First Minister: John Mason is right on that point. Capital spending is, of course, key to economic recovery. As a result of yesterday's budget, our capital grant for 2021-22 remains lower than it was in 2020-21, which is disappointing because it is one of the key levers that we have to support recovery through investment in infrastructure.

As we set out in our budget, the Scottish Government is doing what it can to mitigate that cut. We have maximised capital borrowing and drawn down £200 million of financial transaction capital from the Scottish reserve, which reduces the impact of the 66 per cent cut in financial transaction budget that was received from the UK Government spending review. We are doing what we can to mitigate it, but the cut in capital funding is deeply regrettable and will have consequences for the pace of economic recovery.

Strengthening Social Connection

6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to protect and strengthen social connection in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5F-04870)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The pandemic has hit everyone extremely hard but social connections have possibly suffered more than much else. Our focus is on achieving a balance between suppression and recognition of the social harm of loneliness and isolation. We have invested to tackle loneliness and social isolation from the start of the pandemic through a range of support streams.

In addition, the Connecting Scotland programme will invest a further £43 million in addressing digital exclusion, with a focus on low-income households and older and disabled people. In recent days, pictures of residents in care homes who were reunited with loved ones have moved us all and I hope that, as we ease out of the current restrictions, all of us will enjoy seeing more of those people who we love most.

Brian Whittle: The First Minister might be aware of the talk/together report, which highlights

that extended isolation across all of society is having a profound effect on both the physical and mental health of our population. That lack of social interaction points to a significant escalation of a health crisis that was already a source of strain prior to the pandemic.

One of the crucial elements of the solution is the third sector, with regard to organisations that offer mental health support as well as those that deliver organised sport, art, music and so on. How does the Scottish Government plan not only to ensure that those essential services are still there and fully functioning after Covid, but to encourage re-engagement with a society that, for the past year, has been out of the habit of participating?

The First Minister: Financially, our budget facilitates support for many of the organisations and activities that Brian Whittle has spoken about. He raises an important point—one that is in our minds, but which we need to think more about, and which goes beyond the funding for social connections—about how we help people get back to ways of living that have perhaps become less normal for them. That will perhaps take time, but the Government will continue to pay a lot of attention to it. There will be many ideas across the chamber, on which we will also want to reflect.

European Union Structural Funds (Penalty)

7. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that Scotland faces a penalty of up to £190 million because of irregularities in its European Union structural fund spending. (S5F-04866)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Since 2014, the Scottish Government has allocated more than £700 million of European structural funds to support thousands of people and communities—investing in low-carbon projects, helping people with training and skills development and supporting vital local charities. That funding has been pivotal in supporting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth over a number of years.

The Scottish Government does not face a penalty of up to £190 million in relation to its European structural fund spending. The figure is based on a worst-case scenario of both the European social fund and the European regional development fund remaining in suspension. As the Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance, Ivan McKee, has advised Parliament, the European regional development fund suspension was lifted by the Commission in December 2020, and we continue to work closely with the Commission to progress the lifting of the European social fund suspension.

David Stewart: I am grateful for the First Minister's detailed response. The First Minister will be well aware that my Highlands and Islands region has been one of the United Kingdom's top three beneficiaries of structural funds—from the Kessock bridge to the University of the Highlands and Islands. That funding has sustained and developed the local economy. However, the European Commission has expressed concern for years about two points: weaknesses in the verification checks by the Scottish Government, and failure to meet annual spending targets. Will the First Minister explain why that situation was not resolved? It is now resulting in millions of pounds being lost to the Highlands and Islands and to the rest of Scotland.

The First Minister: The Scottish Government works closely with the European Commission on such issues. They are often highly technical matters, but, as I said in my original answer, we were pleased that the ERDF suspension was lifted in December. I will ask Ivan McKee to write to David Stewart in more detail about the steps that we are taking to address some of the criticisms that have been made, and to give reassurance on those matters.

Covid-19 Vaccination Venues (People with Learning Disabilities)

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Will there be a reconsideration of mass vaccination venues being used as the main premises for vaccinating people with learning disabilities and autism? Will consideration be given to assigning them to general practitioners, which would be a more familiar environment for people who might otherwise experience sensory overload?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will certainly keep the approach under review, and offer those with learning and intellectual disabilities vaccination at their GP or another suitable location. We have also put in place plans to ensure that learning disability nurses will be available to support vaccination for that group. A walk-through video of vaccination centres is being prepared to assist those with learning disabilities and autism who plan to attend a larger vaccination centre. As ever, if anyone is invited for vaccination at a location that might not be suitable for them, for whatever reason, they can make alternative arrangements by contacting the helpline.

Covid-19 (Financial Support Schemes)

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Can the First Minister offer any reassurance to my constituents who are struggling to get information regarding their applications to the mobile and home-based close contact services fund and the

newly self-employed hardship fund? Many have had no acknowledgement, others have been rejected without any explanation and more still are waiting for a follow-up in the next seven to 10 days.

Given the known issues with the schemes, will the First Minister guarantee that the funds will remain open until all applications have been processed correctly? What advice does she have for those who are worried that while they are waiting for the applications to be processed, they might miss out on the opportunity to apply for local authority discretionary funding?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In general terms, I give the assurance that nobody will miss out on funding to which they are entitled due to administrative issues. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to write to Oliver Mundell with more information on the specific funds that he has raised and any issues that are being experienced. We will continue to support business for as long as required as we—in the next couple of months, I hope—come out of lockdown and see businesses start to trade normally again.

After-school Care Facilities (Reopening)

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Now that more children are back at school, and the indication is that all children should return after Easter, when will all the after-school care facilities be permitted to start operating, given that they provide a vital service for working parents?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Forgive me if I am getting this wrong, but I think that I said on Tuesday that, for school-age children, that will happen when primary school children go back. We will continue to set out further stages of school return over the next couple of weeks.

Covid-19 Vaccine Uptake

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I will ask about vaccine hesitancy in society and which groups might be less likely, for whatever reason, to go for their Covid-19 vaccine. It would be helpful to know to what extent that is being monitored, and to what extent uptake is being encouraged among groups in, for instance, some of our black and minority ethnic communities.

Does the First Minister believe that uptake campaigns that bust vaccine myths that are led from within such communities—such as the work of Mr Shakha Sattar and the Kurdish development association, which is currently running the get a jab, save a life campaign—have an important role to play?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It is a really important issue and vaccine hesitancy has

been in our minds since before the start of the vaccination programme. The good news is that, so far, uptake has been higher than anticipated. However, we know that encouraging uptake among particular groups in the country might be more difficult. We must address that, because we must ensure that all adults are included.

The commitment of faith, third sector and community groups, working alongside Government and health boards, means that we are already reaching all parts of the population, including minority ethnic communities. We have provided funding to a variety of organisations working with minority ethnic communities to reach those most unlikely to take up their vaccine offer. Similar to test and protect, the work of organisations supporting minority ethnic groups, such as BEMIS, is essential to ensuring that vaccine information is accessible, culturally appropriate and delivered by trusted voices, such as community leaders. I join Bob Doris in commending the Kurdish development association on its work to ensure that Kurdish communities get reliable information from a source that they trust.

Before I finish, I will say hello to Cameron, who briefly appeared on the screen behind Bob Doris.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Cyberattack)

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): A Helensburgh-based constituent of mine who is seeking to develop their electrical business has been unable to make any progress on their planning application with the council because the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, having been subject to a cyberattack in late December 2020, has been unable to receive and respond to planning consultations or to assist with supplementary information. Will the First Minister elaborate on the discussions that the Scottish Government has had regarding the disruption experienced by SEPA, given its detrimental effect on and the delay that it causes for numerous projects?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In general, undoubtedly the cyberattack has had a significant impact on SEPA's systems and therefore on its work. SEPA is working hard to rebuild the systems and to reduce any backlog caused by the attack.

I will ask SEPA to write directly to Mr Corry with more detail of the work that is under way and the stage that it is at. It is not appropriate for me to comment directly on planning applications or issues, but I will ask SEPA to address the particular issue that the member has raised.

Edinburgh Festivals (Support)

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): What discussions is the Scottish Government having with the Edinburgh festivals about what will be possible this summer, given public health considerations, for live and digital performance options? In the light of yesterday's arts and culture consequentials from the additional £408 million allocated in the United Kingdom budget, what support can the Scottish Government offer to keep the festivals and performers going?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): A range of discussions are under way between the Government and different sectors and organisations on how we can best support them through the on-going impact of restrictions as we—hopefully—come out of lockdown. I will ask the culture secretary to write to Sarah Boyack with specific details of discussions with the Edinburgh festivals.

We all want to see the Edinburgh festivals not just come through Covid, but go from strength to strength. We gave them some support last year and we will continue to ensure that we do what we can to support them and arts and culture organisations and festivals across the country.

I go back to my earlier answer about encouraging people to re-engage as we come out of lockdown. There is no doubt about the importance of culture and the arts in that process and in supporting people's wellbeing as we come out of this challenging time for the whole country.

Women's Aid Services (North Lanarkshire)

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware that North Lanarkshire Council recently took a decision that, in effect, defunds three women's aid services across the council area, including Monklands Women's Aid, which covers my constituency. Due to Scottish Government funding, some services, including the refuge provision, will continue, but there are concerns that many women and children will be left without a vital service and that local jobs will be on the line. The decision has been broadly condemned by national organisations and by MSPs and MPs from across the area and across the political parties.

I understand it is a decision for councillors, but could the First Minister take the opportunity to outline the support that the Scottish Government has made available for domestic abuse services, including women's aid services, and will she commit to looking into the current situation affecting women's aid services in Lanarkshire and consider whether any further support is available

to mitigate the implications of the council's decision?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am aware of the situation in North Lanarkshire. Although the decision is a matter for the local authority, it is deeply disappointing.

Fulton MacGregor is right that we provide funding to Monklands Women's Aid of around £174,000 annually and funding to Motherwell & District Women's Aid of around £111,000 annually. Other funds are open to application, such as the new £13 million delivering equally safe fund to support violence against women and girls services and projects across the country.

Women's access to front-line services that deal with violence and domestic abuse is vital, which is why we have committed to review how national and local specialist services for women and children experiencing gender-based violence are commissioned and funded and how we can ensure quality and sustainability, and that work will commence shortly with an initial twin focus on domestic abuse and sexual violence services.

A9 and A96 (Dualling)

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On 10 February, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity told me in committee that the Scottish Government remained committed to the A9 and A96 projects and the timeframe that had been set out for them. At First Minister's question time on the same day, the First Minister was more cautious, suggesting that progress would be made "as quickly as possible". The transport secretary has written to me and confirmed that a meaningful update on what he now describes as

"a very challenging target completion date"

will not be available until after the Scottish elections and after the summer.

Will the First Minister be honest with my constituents and admit that the Scottish Government does not expect work to dual the A9 in its entirety between Inverness and Perth to be completed by the 2025 target date?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will do everything that we can to do that work as quickly as possible, taking full account of the Covid implications, which have been inescapable for everybody. If possible, we will do that within the original target dates, and if that is not possible we will do it as close to the original target dates as possible. Everybody understands the delays occasioned by Covid and we will make sure that we work to reduce the impact of those as much as we possibly can.

Social Housing (Covid Restrictions)

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

There is a major backlog in social housing allocations, transfers and registrations, with much of social housing operating on a restricted service. What is the Government doing to support local authorities and local housing providers to open up those services as quickly as possible when the restrictions are lifted, given the damage that they are causing communities up and down Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): While restrictions are in place, we have been supporting local authorities financially to a considerable extent and I know that local authorities are working closely with a range of local organisations to support them. Some of the services that have been impacted, including those that Alex Rowley mentioned, are vital for people. I know, as we all will, the impact of that in my constituency.

We will provide that support for as long as necessary, but the Government is really focused on how quickly and safely we can start to lift the restrictions so that services and people's lives more generally can get back to normal. I know that it is frustrating for everybody, but we need to keep encouraging people to abide by all the restrictions so that we can continue to suppress cases of Covid, which will accelerate our progress back to normality and to having services, such as the ones that Alex Rowley talks about, operating normally again.

Human Rights Act 1998 (Independent Review)

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I understand that the Scottish Government has submitted detailed evidence to the United Kingdom independent human rights act review and will strongly oppose any attempt to weaken the Human Rights Act 1998. Rather than ripping up the 1998 act, a move that has been criticised by Amnesty International UK and that academics have warned could undermine Northern Ireland's historic peace agreement, what actions does the First Minister think that the UK Government should take instead, in relation to human rights?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Human Rights Act 1998, in combination with the Scotland Act 1998, is hugely important in protecting fundamental civil and political rights. The Scottish Government will robustly oppose any attempt to weaken those long-standing safeguards and I fear that the review has been established by the UK Government to do exactly that. Our submission to the review also makes it clear that there should be no changes to the 1998 act without the express consent of the Scottish Parliament. My strong preference would be for the UK Government to follow Scotland's example but, as a minimum, it should give a firm commitment to

maintaining the existing protections provided by the 1998 act and to ensuring full compliance with the European convention on human rights.

Publicly Owned Energy Company

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

Four years ago, the First Minister announced that the Scottish Government would set up a publicly owned energy company before the end of the parliamentary session, but four years later and after spending £500,000 of taxpayers' money, there is no sight of that energy company. Can the First Minister tell us when we will see that publicly owned energy company, or is that something else that she has forgotten about?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No, I have not forgotten about it but, like much of the rest of the world, for the past year I have been focused on a global pandemic and trying to lead the country through it. Forgive me if some things have been impacted.

Paul Wheelhouse is continuing that work and I will ask him to write to Dean Lockhart with an update on it. That is one of the many things that we want to get back on track as soon as we get out of the Covid pandemic so that, with the consent of the Scottish people, in a few weeks' time, we can continue to deliver for the people of Scotland.

Care Home Visits (Safety Measures)

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I am pleased about the resumption of care home visits this month, not least because my mother resides in one. Safety is obviously important, but so is human contact between loved ones. What risk assessment has been made to ensure that safety measures do not overwhelm vulnerable residents to the extent that they are unable to recognise their visitors?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): There is guidance in place and we have taken care around that for the reasons that Kenny Gibson sets out, among others. Obviously, care home providers are in the position of ensuring that visiting is as safe as possible and that all the factors that Kenny Gibson outlines are taken into account. There is no doubt that, next to getting young people back to school, giving families the ability to visit older relatives in care homes is our top priority. After that, of course, we desperately want us all to have the ability to visit and spend time with our loved ones.

Loneliness Awareness Campaign

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):

Yesterday, the *Evening Express* reported on an elderly Aberdeen man, who was experiencing

extreme loneliness, following his devoted wife's passing several years ago. Age Scotland estimates that, before the pandemic, every street in Scotland housed a chronically lonely older person, and that has only got worse. Since 2018, we have been pushing for a national loneliness awareness campaign. When can we expect that vital campaign to be brought in? Will the First Minister join me in encouraging any older person to call the Age Scotland free helpline for advice, information or just a chat—on 0800 12 44 222—so that we can try to ensure that what we heard about in Aberdeen might never be repeated?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I very much agree, and this relates to the answer that I gave to Brian Whittle earlier. We need to think about how we support people to reconnect as we come out of what I hope is a unique situation. Loneliness, which was already an issue before the pandemic, has undoubtedly been exacerbated and, as we reconnect, a tackling loneliness awareness campaign will be part of what we do. We all have a part to play in that, however, and now, more than ever, is a time to think of elderly people or people in our networks who are alone, whether they are neighbours, friends or family members, and how we can reach out and help.

Finally, I absolutely endorse the promotion of the Age Scotland helpline—0800 12 44 222. At this time last year, I visited Age Scotland to announce the funding to expand that helpline, to enable it to deal with more people through the pandemic. The helpline has been doing a great job, it is a fantastic resource and people who need it should not hesitate to use it.

United Kingdom Budget

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my concerns that the UK budget has failed to deliver the level of investment and provide the long-term support that businesses and households in my constituency and across Scotland need to ensure a sustainable recovery from the pandemic?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes. The support that was announced in the budget was very welcome, but it had omissions. In certain respects, it felt partial and incomplete and I think that support for businesses and households was significantly less generous than what we have committed to in Scotland. The refusal to make the £20 uplift to universal credit permanent was particularly disappointing. The Resolution Foundation notes that, due to the removal of that payment uplift, the poorest households will face a 7 per cent fall in income in the second half of this financial year. That will take the basic level of benefits back to levels that have not been seen

since the early 1990s, at the same time as unemployment is due to peak.

We have provided certainty and stability to businesses by extending 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for retail, hospitality, leisure and aviation businesses for 12 months. The UK budget fell short of that.

We have taken a number of steps that were not matched yesterday, including, of course, financial support to enable the freezing of council tax. The support was welcome, but there is much more that the UK Government needs to do to help businesses and, more importantly, to help the individuals who are most in need.

Business Grants (Covid-19)

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I, too, have been contacted by several constituents who have applied over the past few weeks for newly self-employed hardship grants and mobile and home-based close contact services grants, only to have their applications rejected because of so-called glitches in the system. With the closing date for applications fast approaching, and having heard nothing back from the Scottish Government, my constituents are left wondering whether they will get the grants to which they are entitled. Will the First Minister guarantee that no one who has applied before the closing date will be denied a grant for which they should be eligible as a result of being wrongly rejected due to a glitch or a malfunction in the system?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I am happy to give the assurance that if someone is eligible for funding they will not lose out on that because of any technical or administrative issue.

Forgive me, as I cannot remember which member raised the topic earlier, but I think that I undertook to get the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to write to that member—I think that it was Oliver Mundell; my apologies, Mr Mundell. I will ask the finance secretary to copy John Scott in as well.

Dundee City Council (Equal Pay Claims)

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Scores of Dundee women are lodging equal pay claims against Dundee City Council, after that Scottish National Party council's failure to properly implement a single status agreement. Those women have been at the forefront of the Covid fight; they are social care workers, cooks and cleaners. We all know that councils are strapped for cash after years of local government cuts by the SNP Government, so will the First Minister commit to paying those equal pay claims from her central budget so that the women workers of Dundee get what they have long been owed?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The matter is of course for Dundee City Council, but I am confident that it will do the right thing. Of course, it has a good example to follow, which is that of SNP-run Glasgow City Council, which resolved the equal pay scandal that was presided over for many years by its Labour predecessors.

Energy Transition Funding

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The United Kingdom Tory Government has once again failed to deliver on its election promises in the north-east by pledging just £27 million to an energy transition fund, despite the Scottish National Party Government's having committed to more than double that amount through its £62 million transition fund. Does the First Minister think, as I do, that the Tories are letting down the people of the north-east and are not taking seriously the climate emergency and the protection of the future livelihoods of my constituents?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, although I would go further; I think that the Tories are letting down the people of Scotland more generally. Thankfully, the people of Scotland will get the chance to have their say before too long.

Any new investment that can help the Scottish Government to realise its ambition to create high-quality jobs and move to a net zero economy is welcome. However, the fact that less than half of the level of the Scottish Government's £62 million investment in the energy transition fund has been committed by the UK Government is a matter that I expect will not escape the attention of Scotland's oil and gas sector and those who work in it.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The First Minister said earlier that the Parliament would debate the findings of the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints and James Hamilton's report. However, the Parliament closes in three weeks. Will the Parliamentary Bureau ensure that time is allocated before then to having that debate if the reports are produced?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Smith. The business managers will have heard your comment and I am sure that they will be able to raise it at the next meeting of the bureau and to discuss finding time for that to happen.

That concludes First Minister's questions. We will resume at 2.30 with portfolio questions.

13:29

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask members to take care to observe those measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber and when accessing and leaving their seats.

Legal Advice

1. **Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body how much it spends annually on the provision of legal advice for the Parliament and its committees.

Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): Before I answer that, I note the presence of David Stewart and Sandra White, who are attending their final SPCB question time. We all come into the corporate body from different parties and we leave our party politics behind, and we do our best for all MSPs and for the reputation of the Parliament. I wish both members well for after the end of the current parliamentary session.

In response to Mr Neil, I confirm that, in 2020-21, the SPCB has a budget of £1,597,000 for the staffing of its legal office, inclusive of employer's national insurance and pension costs.

The Scottish Parliament's legal team fulfils a vital, impartial and professional role in supporting members' work. As well as providing advice to the SPCB and the Presiding Officers, and supporting scrutiny by all of Parliament's committees, a proportion of in-house time will be spent on matters for members either through the member advice scheme or to other SPCB offices that support members. Unfortunately, it is not possible to accurately attribute costs between the different areas of the service, such as committee support, as in-house time is not recorded in that manner.

In addition, in 2020-21 the SPCB has a budgeted spend of £46,000 for the provision of external legal advice across the full range of its services. Legal advice is outsourced to external solicitors under the management of the legal office when particular expertise is required or to manage workflow at times of pressure.

Alex Neil: I thank Mr Carlaw for that information, and wish all members of the corporate body all the best for the future as I will be stepping down myself.

What legal advice did the corporate body receive on how to respond to the recent demand

made of it by the Crown Office regarding redactions from a witness statement, even though that statement had already been published on the Parliament's website?

Jackson Carlaw: I also wish Mr Neil all the best. He actually looks like he is escaping from a mug photo at the moment. It looks as though he is in witness protection because we cannot see him; we can see only a shadow on the screen. However, given that he has said who he is, I will carry on in that spirit.

The SPCB's decisions in relation to the publication of submissions is set out in written answer S5W-35498 to Miles Briggs. The SPCB's decision was informed by advice from officials, external solicitors and senior counsel. The SPCB was fully aware of its legal obligations to abide by the terms of the court order and, after careful consideration of all factors, it collectively decided on 22 February that, on balance, it was possible for the submission to be published.

Following receipt of subsequent correspondence from the Crown Office, the Presiding Officer called an urgent meeting of the SPCB for the morning of 23 February to consider the terms of those letters. Clarification was sought from the Crown Office and received, and it was available for the SPCB's consideration at its meeting that morning.

After due consideration of its contents, and mindful of the balance of judgments that it had undertaken in relation to its earlier decision, the SPCB decided that, although the submission could still be published, some of the content of the former First Minister's submission required to be redacted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions to the SPCB on this occasion.

14:36

Meeting suspended.

14:38

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Finance

Budget (NHS Lothian Eye Care Services)

1. **Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the finance secretary will include funding for a replacement Princess Alexandra eye pavilion in its budget for 2021-22. (S5O-05081)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): We have asked NHS Lothian to carry out a review of its eye care services as a whole and to reconsider how those should be delivered. The most recent estimated cost of the project, from 2019, was £83 million, not £45 million. As with all budget considerations, we have set out alongside that the health portfolio's priorities for the next five years, as part of the capital spending review on 4 February.

Miles Briggs: Will the cabinet secretary explain why Scottish National Party ministers have had to tell NHS Lothian that the Government is not in a position to fund a new hospital now or in the foreseeable future? What has gone wrong in the finances of the Scottish Government and our national health service that has meant that the project, which had been scoped and agreed to by the NHS and the Scottish Government—a contract had been awarded to Graham Construction to build the new hospital—has now been scrapped? At this very late stage, will the cabinet secretary look into the matter and restore funding for the eye hospital?

Kate Forbes: I am intrigued by Miles Briggs's very recent interest in the Scottish Government's budget, considering that he voted against it at stage 1. At no point in the budget negotiations did the Scottish Conservatives ask me to include funding for the Princess Alexandra eye pavilion.

We recognise that the eye pavilion requires investment. It is important that we make the most of our assets, which is why the Scottish Government is committed to doubling our annual maintenance spend over the next five years. The commitment sits alongside our capital spending review, which will see funding in health assets, including the Baird family hospital and Anchor centre in Aberdeen, the elective centre programme and the construction of a new health and social care centre in Parkhead in Glasgow. We will continue our discussions with NHS Lothian to ensure that healthcare is provided in the right places.

Miles Briggs: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The cabinet secretary will be aware that I wrote to her asking for this matter to be included in the budget, so what she said to the Parliament is not accurate. I would appreciate an apology for that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is a point of information, rather than a point of order. If the cabinet secretary wishes to respond to it, she may.

Kate Forbes: I was quite clear that the Conservative Party spokesperson for negotiations on the budget, Murdo Fraser, has not raised the matter in budget negotiations to date.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Irrespective of whether it has been raised in budget negotiations, the project was well advanced and lots of money had been spent on planning, which is more money poured down the drain. The cabinet secretary knows that the Government is quite adept at pouring money down the drain.

Will the cabinet secretary finally admit to patients in Lothian that the project has been cancelled because of a political decision by the Government?

Kate Forbes: With regard to the facility, that is the only politics that we have heard in the past five minutes. As I said in my first answer, we have not given final approval for the construction of a new eye hospital in Edinburgh, which is why funding has not been confirmed.

We have asked NHS Lothian to carry out a review of its eye care services as a whole and to reconsider how they should be delivered. That remains our position. We have asked NHS Lothian to carry out the review, which includes redesigning pathways to enable patients to access care closer to home, and we await recommendations and proposals. We will work with the board to explore how it can more efficiently meet the demand for eye care in Lothian.

Local Authorities (Funding Formula)

2. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it has been working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that fast-growing local authorities, such as Midlothian, are effectively funded through COSLA's funding formula. (S5O-05082)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): The distribution formula is kept under constant review and is agreed with COSLA every year. Although the formula takes into account a range of needs-based factors, it is primarily population based. If the population of Midlothian grows faster than that of other local authority areas, Midlothian Council receives an increased

share of the available funding, all other factors being equal.

We have convened the ministerial population task force, which is committed to addressing Scotland's demographic challenges, so that Scotland's population profile provides a platform for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and wellbeing.

Colin Beattie: We all know the importance of properly funded local authorities. That will undoubtedly be affected by the fact that the United Kingdom Government has cut Scotland's capital budget by more than 5 per cent this year. What representations is the cabinet secretary making to the UK Government to ensure that we get a budget that allows us to better fund our local authorities, so that we can prevent potential council cuts in our local areas?

Kate Forbes: We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to at least maintain Scotland's capital grant next year, pointing to the importance of public sector capital investment to rebuild economies. The cut was to our financial transactions budget, and we have drawn down £200 million from the Scottish reserve to offset that as far as possible. Working with other devolved Governments, we have secured agreement from the UK Government that any late consequentials can be spent next year to reduce pressure on our budget.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): According to COSLA, the increase in the revenue grant for local councils from last year to this year is just 0.9 per cent in terms of their core budgets, yet the Scottish Government's own budget was up by 11 per cent, even before the additional Barnett consequentials that were announced in the UK budget yesterday were added in. How does the finance secretary think that that represents a fair deal for our councils when they are getting less than one 10th of the uplift that is coming to her budget?

Kate Forbes: I certainly do not think that that represents fair arithmetic, because the figure that Murdo Fraser has quoted excludes most of the funding that we have given to local authorities, and certainly excludes Covid consequentials, which he has factored into the 11 per cent figure, so it is not comparing like with like. If anything, members will see from the figures that COSLA will have a 3.1 per cent increase in its core settlement over and above the £259 million that we have agreed for next year's budget, as well as the £275 million of additional funding that I announced just last week to cover lost income.

Budget (Outdoor Education)

3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government how much it has allocated to support the outdoor education sector in its budget for 2021-22. (S5O-05083)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): We will continue to provide funding to help children and young people to experience the benefits associated with outdoor learning. That builds on the £3.235 million that we have provided to support outdoor learning in the current financial year, and £3.178 million of that amount was provided in reaction to challenges emerging from the pandemic. All budget decisions relating to specific education spend next year are yet to be finalised, but we remain committed to supporting outdoor learning experiences right across the curriculum.

Liz Smith: The cabinet secretary knows that the very welcome additional £2 million that was provided by the Scottish Government before Christmas to support the outdoor education sector has already run out, such is the crisis still facing the sector as a result of the second and third waves of Covid. The Parliament is absolutely united in its determination to protect the sector, given its significant value to education and wellbeing. What other funds will be available from the Scottish Government in the coming financial year?

Kate Forbes: Our support for the outdoor centre programme was in recognition of the important role that it plays.

We keep all the funding for lost income and for businesses and enterprises across Scotland under review, and I try to make every penny go as far as I possibly can. There are limited resources, but recognising that there will be an impact on the sector for a lot longer will ensure that we factor that into any new funding that we can provide.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That question is grouped with question 7, from David Torrance.

Outdoor Education Centres (Support in Pandemic)

7. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much the finance secretary has allocated to support outdoor education centres during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-05087)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): We have provided £2 million specifically to support residential outdoor education centres during the pandemic. That funding was provided through the Covid-19 residential outdoor education centre recovery fund, and it is helping about 33

centres across Scotland to cover their operating costs during pandemic-related disruption.

David Torrance: Does the cabinet secretary agree that outdoor education will play a vital role in supporting families as they recover from the mental health impact of the pandemic by providing opportunities to rebuild children's and adults' confidence and to improve their physical wellbeing?

Kate Forbes: I do agree with that. In light of the impacts of Covid-19 on young people, it is more important than ever that they are able to enjoy the outdoors. Learning outdoors can improve physical and mental wellbeing and can support educational attainment. Those benefits have a wide impact on the families of the young people involved, which is why we have already put in place funding to support those outdoor residential centres—many of which, incidentally, are in my constituency.

Budget (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)

4. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in advance of setting the health expenditure in its 2021-22 budget. (S5O-05084)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with representatives of all national health service boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to address pressures from Covid-19 and to support recovery and the remobilisation of services. The budget for next year confirms additional core funding of £35.4 million for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which increases the board's overall funding to £2.4 billion. The Scottish budget also includes more than £1 billion specifically to support our front-line health and care services to address Covid-19 pressures.

Neil Bibby: The Scottish Government tells us that it is protecting the NHS budget, yet the repair backlog at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley now stands at an eye-watering £76 million and has been growing for years. The entire budget for investment in the health board's existing estate was only £37 million this year, which is less than half of what is needed to clear the repair backlog at the RAH alone. Given that that backlog gets bigger each year after successive Scottish Government budgets, when can people in Paisley expect to see the investment that is needed at the RAH?

Kate Forbes: Presiding Officer, it is quite hard to hear. I do not know whether there is scope to put the volume up.

I thank the member for the question, which I think was about estate maintenance. We intend to double annual maintenance spend in the NHS

over the next five years. That clear ask came from the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland and will result in an investment of £1 billion for enhancing or refurbishing existing facilities and updating and modernising key equipment over that period. We recognise that it is important that we get the most out of our assets and make that funding go as far as possible.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the health service will receive sufficient funding for both Covid and other purposes?

Kate Forbes: I confirm that, despite a lack of clarity on funding from the United Kingdom Government, in our budget we announced increased investment of £316 million for our front-line NHS boards and a further £1 billion to respond to Covid-19.

Last week, I wrote to Rishi Sunak, imploring him to provide a comprehensive and flexible support package for health and care. It was striking that, in his statement yesterday, health, mental health and social care got very few mentions.

Budget (Gender Pay Gap)

5. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what measures in its 2021-22 budget aim to tackle the gender pay gap. (S5O-05085)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): There are many drivers of the gender pay gap, so many solutions need to be in place. Our budget supports work across Government to improve women's position in the labour market and reduce the gender pay gap.

We are investing a further £59 million for the expansion of early learning and childcare, which is vital for many women workers, and we will continue to support fair work, including in relation to workplace equalities, flexible working and women returners. There are also additional investments of £70 million for the young person's guarantee, £5 million for the parental employability support fund and £27 million for our fair start Scotland employability service, all of which contribute to tackling the gender pay gap.

Claudia Beamish: The fair work convention reported in 2019—pre-pandemic—that 83 per cent of staff employed in social care in Scotland were women. It also reported that the average hourly rate was £9.79. During the pandemic, this notoriously undervalued sector has been more publicly recognised.

As we all know, international women's day is on Saturday, and the hashtag #ChooseToChallenge highlights gender inequality, which is perpetuated by income insecurity and poverty pay. Scottish

Labour has chosen to challenge, with a proposal for an immediate increase in wages to £12 per hour for the care sector and a phased increase to £15 an hour.

The cabinet secretary has highlighted some issues that the Scottish Government is taking forward through the budget. Will the Government support our ask for decent salaries in the care sector and help women even more than she highlighted to tackle this real inequity?

Kate Forbes: I agree with the premise of Claudia Beamish's question with regard to the high number of women who work in the care sector as both paid and unpaid carers. She is aware that we supported unpaid carers during the pandemic by providing the coronavirus carers allowance supplement of £230.10, which was paid in June, backed by an investment of £19 million. For the paid carer sector, we have put in place a public sector pay policy that balances the need to recognise the efforts of our front-line workers, who have worked tirelessly over the past year, with affordability challenges due to the freeze south of the border. We will continue to keep that all under review, and I recognise the Labour Party's position in relation to our budget.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary advise how the 2021-22 public sector pay policy can help to improve conditions and address workplace inequalities, including the gender pay gap?

Kate Forbes: This year, we have taken a progressive approach, building on our approach in previous years. That includes the application of the real living wage of £9.50 per hour, the £750 cash underpin, and the cash cap for high earners, which help to work towards reducing the gender pay gap in the public sector. The policy provides proportionally higher increases for lower earners, where women are historically overly concentrated. That is further offset by the continued restraint applied to higher earners, where there are still higher proportions of men.

Budget (Housing)

6. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much it has allocated to spend on housing in its 2021-22 budget. (S5O-05086)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): In the 2021-22 budget, we have allocated just over £1 billion to housing. That includes £163.5 million in resource, £808.3 million in capital and £116.5 million in financial transactions.

We would all agree that the pandemic has highlighted the importance of homes and the spaces around them to support people. Scotland

has led the way in the delivery of affordable housing across the United Kingdom, with almost 97,000 affordable homes having been delivered since 2007. We are committed to supporting the delivery of more affordable homes, and £832 million has been allocated for that purpose in 2021.

Jeremy Balfour: Although we all welcome that the Scottish National Party Government has apportioned more funds since the publication of the draft budget, it does not change the fact that the housing budget will still be cut by around £120 million this year. Why is putting people in good, affordable homes not a budget priority for the Government this year?

Kate Forbes: I will respectfully answer that question in the same way that I answered it at the Finance and Constitution Committee. Our financial transactions budget has been cut by 67 per cent and our overall capital budget has been cut by 5 per cent. Despite that and the fact that those cuts were not reversed in the chancellor's budget statement yesterday, we have chosen to prioritise affordable homes as part of our capital budget, and have set out an ambitious programme to do so.

Before the uplift, I said that if there was more capital, I would prioritise affordable homes. I did that with an uplift of more than £100 million. If there is further funding, I will look at that again. However, because we cannot borrow, that additional funding can only come from the UK Government.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Over this parliamentary session, what has been the per capita spend on affordable housing in Scotland compared with south of the border, where Mr Balfour's party is in office?

Kate Forbes: The fact that we are leading the way in the delivery of affordable housing is backed up by evidence and statistics. In the four years to 2020, we delivered more than 75 per cent more affordable homes per head of population than were delivered in England. In that time, we delivered more than nine times more social rented properties per head of population than were delivered in England, and in each of the past two financial years, we have delivered a greater number of social rented properties in Scotland than have been delivered across the whole of England. We want to build on a reputation of being ambitious when it comes to building affordable homes, but we can only do that with the budget that I have, which is set by Westminster.

Local Authorities (Funding)

8. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what

plans it has to increase funding to local authorities. (S5O-05088)

The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government has already announced an additional £335.6 million for local authorities' vital day-to-day services, and a further £259 million of Covid-19 funding for 2021-22. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance is currently considering the impact of yesterday's delayed United Kingdom budget. If any changes are needed to the Scottish budget, those will be confirmed to the Scottish Parliament during the final stages of the budget bill process next week.

Alexander Burnett: In light of the additional money provided by the UK Treasury in yesterday's budget, will the Cabinet Secretary for Finance support our proposals for a new fiscal framework for council funding? In the meantime, will the minister sign my petition to increase funding for Aberdeenshire Council, so that it can cover funding for all bridge infrastructure repairs in Aberdeenshire, or will he step back and let more communities be divided?

Ivan McKee: First, no new money for local authorities was announced in yesterday's UK budget. Secondly, Aberdeenshire Council received a total funding package of £503.3 million to support local services. That is equivalent to an increase of 4.1 per cent compared with 2020-21.

On the proposals for the fiscal framework, if the member listened to our debate on the subject, he will be aware that introducing a fixed percentage would have many implications that I am sure that he would not welcome. I do not think that he has thought it through. There would be an implication for health spending, which, as a consequence, would not be increased in the way that we are delivering on and that his party called for in a previous manifesto. There would also be an impact year to year, because there have been years with an increased percentage for local government and if that framework had been in place, we could not have done that.

We are working collaboratively with local authorities on the framework and that is the right way to do it. That will yield the correct result and produce a meaningful framework worked out by Scottish Government and local authorities together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the finance portfolio.

Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): As members will be aware, at this point in the proceedings, I am required under the standing orders to decide whether any provision of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether it modifies the electoral system and franchise for Scottish parliamentary elections. In my view no provision of the bill relates to a protected subject matter and therefore the bill does not require a supermajority to be passed at stage 3.

As we know, there are no amendments at stage 3, so we move straight to the debate on motion S5M-24057, in the name of Gordon Lindhurst, on the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill.

15:03

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): Presiding Officer,

“They say we’re young and we don’t know”—

or at least they did five years ago. They could be forgiven for feeling that we are all now trapped in a type of groundhog day. We debated pre-release access in November 2018, September 2019 and November 2020 and we are debating it again today. It has taken four years, three cabinet secretaries, two ministers and a change of convener to get here, but it is my hope that we are about to break out of this time loop.

Statistics matter—they not only describe the world, but help to shape it.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon Lindhurst: Not at this stage.

Two hundred years ago, a politician wrote the 21-volume “Statistical Account of Scotland”, an undertaking said to have required the labour of Hercules combined with the patience of Job. The author, Sir John Sinclair, saw it as an inquiry

“for the purposes of ascertaining the quantum of happiness.”

His view of its relevance to the public was that it was

“the means by which their temporal and eternal interests can best be promoted.”

Then, as it is now, data could be a guide to the decisions affecting us, and the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee believes that it should be available on an equal and not a privileged basis. That is the premise of the committee’s bill.

As the president of the Royal Statistical Society wrote to the First Minister last September,

“Quite simply, allowing a government privileged access to official statistics risks undermining public trust ... it creates opportunities for figures to be ‘spun’ to the media or ‘buried’ beneath other announcements.”

The bill would do three things. It would remove pre-release access for two categories of economic data, take a phased approach to that removal and review its impact, and reduce to one working day the pre-release access for statistics where five is now the norm. Let me elaborate.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): In the midst of the biggest economic crisis since the second world war, is it not somewhat worrying that the biggest and most pressing issue that the economy committee thinks the Scottish economy is facing is pre-release access to statistics?

Gordon Lindhurst: That is the same repeated, and, frankly, boring point that has been made previously in these debates. It is worrying that the Scottish Government considers it important to oppose so obvious a solution and spend the Parliament’s time doing that in the course of a pandemic rather than agreeing with it.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): On the cabinet secretary’s point, does the member agree that at this time of crisis and emergency, we need facts and figures and that this is about the timing of the release of statistics? No additional effort would be needed; it would just be done a bit more quickly.

Gordon Lindhurst: Yes, I agree with the member and I will come on to that point.

Let me elaborate on what the bill will do. The first strand would end pre-release access for retail sales and gross domestic product, neither of which is subject to pre-release at the UK level, and the second strand would stipulate that the removal of pre-release access should be phased. One day would be reduced to a half day after one year, then pre-release access would be removed altogether after two years, with an independent review of the impact after three years, the findings of which would be laid before the Parliament. The third strand would bring pre-release access down to one day for economic data where a longer duration presently applies.

However—here we come to the point—why does all that matter? Why the fuss? Why at this stage? John Pullinger, a former United Kingdom national statistician, suggests that, if life can be unpredictable,

“Statistics can help us to assess risk and to stay the right side of foolishness”,

and that they provide

“a balance to our sometimes wayward hearts.”

Perhaps that is relevant to the present Scottish National Party Government in relation to this matter. The trick, Pullinger says, is to encourage statistical thinking. Eight out of 10 cat owners who expressed a preference said that their cats preferred it. However,

“statistical thinking helps us to ask which cats, did they really prefer it, and prefer it to what?”

The risk of not engaging in statistical thinking is highlighted by Daniel Kahneman. The Nobel prize-winning psychologist contends that

“it probably contributes to an explanation of why people litigate, why they start wars, and why they open small businesses.”

Some might not consider limiting pre-release access for economic data to be a headline grabber, but statistics are a public asset. They belong to us all, so they should be available to everyone at the same time. In the language of *The Wall Street Journal*, there should be no “early peeks”.

We are far from alone in coming to that conclusion. That view is shared by a majority of the statistical community, including the Office for National Statistics; the Royal Statistical Society; the UK Statistics Authority; the Bank of England; Professor Sir Charles Bean, author of the 2016 independent review of economic data; Dame Jill Matheson, former UK national statistician; John Pullinger, whom I already mentioned; Professor Sir Ian Diamond, the current UK national statistician; the Institute for Public Policy Research; the Fraser of Allander institute; the Adam Smith Institute; the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee; Michael Blastland, creator of Radio 4’s “More or Less”; Will Moy, chief executive of Full Fact; and Sir David Spiegelhalter, the statisticians’ statistician.

I will not carry on with the list, because I can see the Presiding Officer looking at me with regard to the time. I will not make any further song and dance about it but, come decision time, I hope that we might add this Parliament to that list.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: Ivan McKee will open for the Government.

15:11

The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee): If we go by some of the debates that we have had on the budget over the

past while, it would be fair to say that eight out of 10 Tory MSPs do not understand statistics.

I start by reiterating two key principles that this Government stands by. First, data statistics and evidence are at the heart of our policy decisions, and secondly, we need to understand, explain and be transparent about why decisions have been made. High-quality and relevant official statistics, trusted professional statisticians and well-informed politicians, who understand the data, are vitally important in allowing us to follow those principles.

Faced with unprecedented challenges to physical and mental health, finances and our way of life, the importance of data, evidence and statistics has never been greater. That is why I am disappointed that this Parliament’s focus and energy has been on a bill that aims to challenge a valuable, managed and well-functioning process, rather than on building further trust in the value of our statistics.

Our position remains that we oppose further restrictions on pre-release access and we consider the bill an unhelpful distraction. The quality of our economic statistics—and official statistics more generally—is paramount and the Scottish Government fully complies with the code of practice for statistics.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister not concede that the bill is not about the time that is taken to prepare statistics? It is purely about their release and who has access to them once they are prepared. I agree with him that it is important that time is taken, but why should the Government have privileged access? Surely, various people’s opinions are equally valid to that of the Government, and that openness is required in order to build trust.

Ivan McKee: The member is correct that the issue is not about the time that is taken to prepare the statistics, but it is, as I said, about the time that is taken to understand the statistics, because the reality is that the Government uses the statistics to make decisions. Those decisions need to be correct and the Government has to answer to what lies behind those statistics, not just to the headline number. It is easy for people to ask the questions when they have just seen the statistics but, to give a sensible, meaningful answer, we need to understand what lies behind those numbers, why they are what they are and, frankly, what we are going to do about them.

Our current arrangements for pre-release access provide a clear framework for statisticians to manage and communicate the numbers that they understand the best. The reason for our opposition to the bill is not, as has been suggested, that we want to protect our first-mover advantage, but that we believe that the

governance and operation of the statistical system in Scotland is best left in the hands of the experts. The experts are the highly skilled professional statisticians, led by the chief statistician, a civil servant who is bound by the civil service code of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. It is his view that pre-release access is an integral part of the production process for official statistics, and that it operates well and appropriately. He believes that current arrangements strike the correct balance between carefully controlling access and ensuring that responses to questions on public statements are based on a correct understanding of the statistics—that is the key point. The bill will not improve public trust in official figures but will make achieving that balance more challenging.

Doing my job is made easier by the statistics that I see on public finance, economic growth and trade. Being able to work with statisticians helps me to properly interpret the numbers and take decisions that are in the best interests of Scotland. If we are serious about delivering improvements, we need to understand the story behind the statistics rather than rush to comment on numbers that we have just seen. Understanding the why, not just the what, of the numbers is critical to being able to comment from a position of understanding and not just take part in a battle of soundbites. Now more than ever, we should be reducing the risk of misinterpretation or confusion over the figures and the resulting significant and damaging impact on public trust.

I end on a positive note. I am proud to say that the Scottish Government plays a leading role in improving how data and statistics are used to deliver real benefits for Scotland and beyond. Public trust in the Scottish Government to act in the best interests of the country remains significantly higher than it does in the UK Government. To use some statistics, according to the latest Scottish social attitudes survey in 2019, 61 per cent trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interest, compared with 15 per cent for the UK Government.

Regardless of the outcome of the debate, the Government is committed to continuing to build on that success by following the three pillars of the code of practice for statistics, which are invested in the trust, quality and value of our official statistics. We will continue to support the work of highly skilled statisticians to realise the value that is inherent in the vast amount of data that the Government holds, and to make that publicly available in an ethical and transparent way.

15:16

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): When last we debated the bill, I pointed out that statistics are not just numbers on a page, but a public asset

that is used to inform policy. It is therefore vital that the public has trust in both the statistics themselves and how they are used.

The current model of privileged access in Scotland does not lend itself to maintaining, let alone strengthening, that trust. That is because SNP ministers currently enjoy a level of early access well beyond what is required—a full five days, in some cases. That allows ministers far too much leeway to spin figures or even to try to bury them away. We need only think back to Derek Mackay's attempts, a few months before he was forced from office, to spin the dropping of employment by 43,000 by deflecting to a 0.3 per cent decline in youth unemployment, or his attempt to spin a £12.6 billion "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland" deficit as somehow a sign of strength.

There is a clear need for reform—and experts agree. The UK Statistics Authority has called for the SNP's excess PRA period to be significantly rolled back, and it is not alone. In evidence to the committee, Martin Weale of the Royal Statistical Society called the lengthy period of pre-access in Scotland

"an anomaly relative to almost the whole developed world."—[*Official Report, Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee*, 26 September 2017; c 9.]

It is disappointing, then, that the SNP has chosen to defend its privilege and to oppose reform at every opportunity. It rejected the committee's initial recommendations, which forced the committee to pursue reform through legislation. Every SNP committee member then opposed the bill, and the party refused to vote for it at stage 1. We even had a minister—Ben Macpherson—claiming that the bill was a political attack on the SNP. He said that the

"intention to remove pre-release access, at least somewhat, seems political".—[*Official Report*, 12 November 2020; c 87.]

In reality, the bill takes a measured approach to reform that recognises the need for ministers to have a sensible level of early access. In fact, the bill is far more generous than some have been calling for. The UK Statistics Authority wants PRA to be reduced from five days to just three hours, but the bill offers a full 24 hours for certain economic statistics. Even where PRA would be removed—for GDP and retail statistics—there is a phased approach, not a cliff-edge cut. PRA would be initially reduced to 24 hours, then, after a year, to four hours, before being removed entirely. An independent review mechanism will examine the impact on GDP statistics. If access needs to be restored, that will be able to be done without further legislation.

The bill does not seek to intrude beyond the committee's remit into education, health or any other portfolio area.

Ivan McKee: I do not know how good the member is with numbers, but how long does he think that it would take him to understand a set of numbers and be able to pass sensible comment on them?

Maurice Golden: A lot quicker than it would take the minister.

The bill does not question the integrity of Scottish Government statistics. It simply seeks to address valid concerns that have been raised by experts. The bill is entirely reasonable, and I urge members to support it.

15:20

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Before I get to the important substance of the debate, I commend the committee for introducing a committee bill, which is an underused mechanism in the Parliament. I believe that I am correct in saying that the Parliament has passed only seven committee bills since it came into being in 1999, and all but two of those bills were about internal regulation, matters of standards and other such issues, so the committee is to be commended for introducing a bill of substance that will make a difference. I call on committees in the next parliamentary session to seriously consider using the power and capacity that they have. I am recommending that my committee's legacy paper makes suggestions about future committee bills that could be introduced.

This is a bill that matters and an issue that matters because, as Gordon Lindhurst set out, statistics matter. We live in a world of post-truth politics where we constantly see the undermining of information sources and the questioning of facts. Quite simply, we need to build back trust, because truth matters, experts matter and statistics matter. What destroys trust is the sense that things are being only partially presented, being spun or being presented in a manner that protects particular interests and diminishes others. The concept of framing information is well understood and one that everyone in the chamber understands. The more opportunity we give for things to be framed from a particular vantage point, the more people's sense of mistrust in facts and statistics will increase.

We have heard from the Scottish Government that it needs time to understand things. I put it gently to the minister that I am sure that he does not need more than 24 hours to understand a set of numbers. I know that he is pretty good with numbers, and I know that, given a statistical

release, I do not need more than a single sleep to digest it.

The minister is right that we need to ensure that people understand what numbers are saying, but I politely say to him that the Government's perspective is not the only valid perspective—it is not even the only important one. It is important that we have equal access so that we have a balanced debate. For as long as people feel that the debate is imbalanced, we run the risk of undermining trust, which we need to combat.

I politely suggest that the Government needs to learn that lesson urgently. In this week of all weeks, the sooner it releases information, the better. Delays in discharging its duty simply undermine public trust.

I also politely suggest to the Government that, right now, it is sitting on information—critically, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report—that the Parliament has asked for it to release and which it must release. It is not right that the Government can sit on that report for months while it gives suggestions and asks for alterations and updates.

Quite simply, in the 21st century, time matters. There are no secrets in the 21st century; all that there is is openness. The more people delay or seek to delay, the more they build in mistrust. The time periods were introduced at a time of typing pools and paper memos. A century ago, it took time—it might well have been days—to disseminate information, but it now takes literally milliseconds for information to be duplicated and disseminated.

Quite simply, pre-release access is not good practice; best practice demands early release. Best practice is supported by the Royal Statistical Society, the ONS, the UK Statistics Authority and others. I will put it like this: if the Bank of England, whose data sets are among the most sensitive that are produced across these islands, does not enjoy pre-release access, why should the Scottish Government have it?

15:24

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Let me start by picking up on a few things that have already been said. Daniel Johnson talked about data. Data becomes information only when it has been analysed. In other words, providing data is not an immediate provision of information.

We also heard reference, from the minister in response to a Tory member, to the code of practice for the use of statistics. It is worth saying something about that code of practice because, in effect, the Government is bound by it. That is

associated, in part, with the proposals before Parliament today, because the code of practice for the use of statistics is not applicable to the political parties that are in opposition.

The code says:

“By complying with the Code, your organisation will show that: ... It is ethical and honest in using any data ... It respects evidence”

and

“It communicates accurately, clearly and impartially.”

Those duties are placed on the Government, and the Government is held accountable for obeying them and the ministerial code. No such obligations are placed on Opposition parties if they receive data without information at the same time as the Government. They can immediately comment and are not held to account should they selectively quote favourable data or communicate it in a way that is not accurate, clear and impartial. However, the Government has to take time to ensure it meets those standards. Therefore, the artificial suggestion that this creates a sense of evenness and balance between Government and those who hold it to account is a false distinction that simply does not bare reasonable analysis.

I am interested in statistics; I am a humble mathematician. My wife is also a mathematician, and she has a statistics qualification in addition to that. I always go to her. She tells me—this is a matter of grave concern to me—that, statistically, I shall be on this planet for another 12 to 14 years. That is not very long, so I take a close interest in that statistic and hope that the actuaries and statisticians who produced it are underestimating the length of time that I now have left.

The bill seeks to provide information to Opposition parties. Giving information to Opposition parties is good; I have been in opposition and know how valuable it is. However, in providing information, the bill provides nothing in the way of controls and responsibilities for the recipients of information who are not in government.

That goes to the heart of the principal flaw in taking the approach that is proposed by the committee. I respect the committee’s work and the reason why it has introduced the bill—those are both to be respected and applauded—but I am afraid that it fails the test of creating a level playing field, which is what advocates for the bill suggest that it does. Unfortunately, it does no such thing.

Daniel Johnson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you clarify whether all members are under an obligation to speak the truth in the chamber and that misleading Parliament is taken very seriously? I am thinking about Mr

Stevenson’s comment that there is no such equivalent obligation for Opposition members.

The Presiding Officer: That point is true: every member has an obligation to speak the truth. I am not entirely sure that Mr Stevenson was not speaking the truth. He was giving a point of view.

I was going to tell Mr Stevenson that his time was up, but after his contribution I do not think that I should use that choice of words.

15:29

Gordon Lindhurst: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I hope that my time is not yet up, in the chamber or elsewhere.

World statistics day was last November, and the tagline was

“Connecting the world with data we can trust”.

Although the bill is purely about economic statistics, it is probably fair to say that, over the past 12 months, we have all come to appreciate the importance of data and the excellent work of our statisticians.

The minister’s comment about Tories and statistics is a slightly odd one, given that every member of the cross-party committee, apart from the SNP members, supported the bill. At the same time, even the SNP members, who were a minority on the report, took the following view:

“The Committee considers there should be a presumption against pre-release access and invites the Scottish Government to put forward arguments why pre-release access should be continued for specific statistics.”

Therefore, it was not just the majority and the cross-party consensus but the SNP minority who expressed that view about the current situation.

I think, as other members have said, that we really need to address in Parliament the issues that surround openness, fairness and transparency in these things. I do not think that members of the public who have observed some of what has taken place in Parliament over the past five years would refer to it as a balanced, well-managed and functioning place in every respect. The bill is a small step towards ensuring that the systems that are in place are conducive to having a Scottish Parliament and a Scottish Government that are held to account so that they are in fact balanced, well managed and functioning.

With those words, I close my contribution to the debate.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on stage 3 of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill.

Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill: Stage 3

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): As members might be aware, at this point in the proceedings, I am required under the standing orders to decide whether, in my view, any provision in the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether the bill modifies the electoral system or the franchise for Scottish Parliament elections. In my view, it does not, and therefore it does not require a supermajority to be passed at stage 3.

The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24038, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill.

15:32

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Last September, the Parliament agreed to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's proposal for a committee bill that would allow the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland to investigate complaints of past sexual harassment made about members of the Parliament in respect of behaviour towards members of their own staff. The bill and its accompanying documents were introduced last November, and I am delighted to be able to speak to the chamber today and to invite the Parliament to agree to pass the bill.

The bill also removes a default time limit for making complaints to the commissioner, and removes any requirement for the complainer's signature. The bill, though important, is fairly narrow in scope. If passed, it will open up a complaint route for a member's own staff, including any staff who are employed jointly by that member with other members under a pooling arrangement, in cases of alleged sexual harassment by that MSP. It does not retrospectively apply a new substantive standard of conduct—it has never been acceptable or lawful for MSPs to sexually harass their employees.

The bill is the result of work that was initiated by the Parliament in 2017 to address sexual harassment, after press reports that there were issues that required to be addressed in public institutions. Since then, a series of changes have been made to the "Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament", with the aim of ensuring that MSPs, MSP staff and parliamentary staff who experience sexual harassment can be assured that their complaint will be investigated independently and in confidence.

A joint working group on sexual harassment was established by the Parliament in February 2018. It was made up of representatives from all parties, as well as senior members of parliamentary staff and a representative from Engender. The joint working group reported in December 2018 and made a series of recommendations. Following a consultation on those recommendations, the report was referred by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to my committee to implement the recommendations relating to the standards regime in the Parliament.

The committee considered the joint working group's recommendations before consulting all MSPs on proposed revisions to the code of conduct to implement two of the working group's key recommendations: that no time limit should be applied to complaints of sexual harassment; and that members should be held to account for their behaviour towards their own staff in the same way as for their behaviour towards anyone else working in the building. The joint working group also wished to see consistency of approach in all investigations of allegations of sexual harassment by MSPs.

Following its consultation, the committee recommended—and the Parliament agreed—a number of changes to the code of conduct. Those made it possible for the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland to investigate complaints about an MSP's conduct towards parliamentary staff or the staff of other members. Such complaints had previously been termed "excluded complaints" and were subject to different procedures. Only if those procedures failed to reach a resolution, could they then be referred to the Commissioner.

The changes to the code of conduct also brought members' treatment of their own staff within the code for the first time. That provision, agreed by the Parliament, prohibits MSPs from behaving in a manner towards their own staff that includes bullying; harassment, including sexual harassment; and any other inappropriate behaviour. Although clearly never acceptable or lawful, sexual misconduct by an MSP toward his or her own staff was explicitly prohibited by the code of conduct from that moment forward. However, the bill is needed so that complaints can be made about historical conduct by MSPs, including former MSPs, towards their staff.

The bill is necessary because the legislation governing the remit of the Standards Commissioner allows her to investigate only breaches of a "relevant provision" of the code of conduct, standing orders or legislation relating to members' interests in place at the time of the alleged misconduct. The joint working group also specifically recommended the removal of an extra

barrier to the bringing forward of complaints that are made more than a year after the complainer becomes aware of the misconduct. The committee believes that that measure should be applied to complaints of any breaches, not just those relating to sexual harassment, so that all complaints are on an equal footing.

The bill removes some of the barriers to complaining about sexual misconduct by MSPs and places potential complainers on a more equal footing if they decide to take that step. I was encouraged by the cross-party support that the bill enjoyed in previous debates, and I hope that I can rely on members' support for it at decision time.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: I call the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, Graeme Dey, to open for the Government.

15:37

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I attended this morning a meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, partly to offer the Government's thoughts on procedural changes that the committee has worked on throughout the current parliamentary session. I note the sheer volume of work that the committee has undertaken, of which the bill before us is a key strand.

The bill is certainly not the largest one to be scrutinised this session, but the Government would argue that it is among the most important. The bill is also one of the products to emerge from the Parliament's wider work in response to the issue of sexual harassment. At stage 1, I and many others highlighted the importance of sending out a clear message that the Parliament would not tolerate any individual suffering such abuse. The bill plays a part towards achieving that aim.

The subject matter of the bill is for the Parliament. However, the Government welcomes the consensus that there has been around the bill throughout its passage, which has sent a powerful message. The judgment of the joint working group, as endorsed and delivered by the committee, has resulted in a bill that has remained free from any attempt to amend it, which is a characteristic that the Government considers only serves to further reinforce that the Parliament stands as one on the issue.

As I mentioned at stage 1, ensuring that our rules and practices in this area are fair, sensitive and supportive is essential for an entity at the

centre of Scottish democracy. You will be pleased to know, Presiding Officer, that I will refrain from rehearsing the fine detail of the bill's proposed changes to the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Act 2002. Suffice it to say that the Government considers that the bill will serve as a welcome enhancement of the complaints framework.

I should also note the committee's work to amend section 7 of the code of conduct. The changes agreed by the Parliament earlier this week ensure that section 7 of the code covers members' conduct towards individuals external to the Parliament. That approach is, of course, essential to the aim of assuring anyone engaging with parliamentarians that they can challenge any behaviour that they deem to be inappropriate or unacceptable.

In conclusion, I commend the committee, its clerks and the legal advisers for their work on this important bill, the terms of which are fully supported by the Government. I look forward to hearing the views of other members.

15:40

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Given the time available and the broad consensus that exists, I do not plan to speak for long or in any great detail. However, given the subject matter, it is important to put on the record, on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, our support for the bill.

It is neither the time nor the place to go into the details of individual past incidents that have led us to today, but we must all recognise that the culture that was allowed to exist in our national Parliament—just as in many other parts of our society—was unacceptable and fell far below the standard required and expected. I am grateful to all those in the Parliament and in the committee who have worked hard to ensure that our procedures and processes are fit for purpose.

There is no room for complacency, but the changes represent a step forward. By extending the commissioner's remit and removing the one-year time limit, the bill also allows for any concerns to be properly and independently investigated.

I urge all colleagues to support the changes, which are straightforward but much needed, at decision time.

15:41

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): In this week of all weeks, it is important to reiterate that there is no place for sexist, racist, homophobic or any other such behaviour in our society, and especially in our national Parliament. The results of the sexual harassment survey that was issued in the

Parliament have to be a watershed moment. This institution can never again be in a position in which members of staff feel threatened, uncomfortable, under pressure, victimised or subject to any other such behaviour by MSPs or, indeed, anyone else whom they meet during their working day.

The fact that more than 300 people reported that they had experienced sexual harassment while working in the Parliament is truly shocking. What is worse is that they said that they had little confidence in the Parliament's procedures for dealing with it. That is simply not good enough.

People have gone through the detail of the bill and we have discussed it to death, so I do not intend to go over it. The bill is straightforward, the committee has dealt with it in a straightforward way, and there has been no need for amendments.

There is not much more to add, other than to say that I hope that all members will support the bill tonight.

15:42

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Once the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill is passed at stage 3, it will make significant changes to shortcomings in the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Act 2002, which we have been working under since the early days of the Scottish Parliament.

The new act will make the Parliament a much fairer place to work in and create an environment in which there is less fear, bullying and intimidation of employees. It will create a workplace that is more in keeping with the expectations of the Scottish people. It will also ensure that any sexual harassment predator cannot be absolved of their crimes by a technicality such as a time bar. The workplace will be a better place because everyone can be held accountable for their behaviour.

The people of Scotland have an expectation that they will be able to live their lives free from abuse, harassment and intimidation, and it is imperative that the Parliament and our wider workplace demonstrate rules and practices that are fair and supportive of everyone, including our employees.

The "Report of the Joint Working Group on Sexual Harassment" for the Parliament highlighted that, although 30 per cent of women employees surveyed had experienced sexual harassment or sexist behaviour, only a few had made a complaint. In my opinion, that sad state of affairs was undoubtedly a result of victims trying to protect their employment and avoid a blighted career. That was an entirely unacceptable

situation in a society committed to eradicating inequalities.

This new bill complements work already undertaken by the Parliament to tackle harassment and now incorporated in the MSPs' code of conduct, in that it includes those working group recommendations that can be delivered only through primary legislation. Although far reaching, the new legislative measures themselves are simple and straightforward and will be clear and transparent to everybody.

The previous legislation created a situation in which the commissioner could rule a complaint by an MSP's staff member of sexual harassment by that MSP in the period before 7 January 2020 as inadmissible, on the ground that the conduct complained about did not breach a "relevant provision". The bill will give MSPs' staff the same rights as everyone else and will end that abuse of their human rights. I am sure that everyone will support that much-needed change.

In the current climate of historical sexual abuse claims and court cases worldwide, and with the subject of harassment and abuse very much in the public consciousness, it is a welcome provision that the bill eliminates any time limits barring investigation of complaints of sexual harassment or sexist behaviour. The provision will have a transformational impact on how historical allegations are dealt with. Victims who previously felt unable to make a complaint will be able to come forward, now that their career prospects are being protected.

The third change is a minor one to rules about complainers' signatures and will ease administrative processes.

The bill will lead to a much-improved and more equal political institution which will make the Scottish people proud of their Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: Patrick Harvie will wind up the debate.

15:47

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the members, officials and everyone else who contributed to the work on the bill and to its scrutiny. I am happy to close the debate on behalf of the committee. Graeme Dey emphasised the consensus that has characterised the bill and said that he was pleased to see cross-party agreement not only on the principle of the bill but on its detail. I hope that that is shared across the chamber.

This is a shorter debate than most at stage 3 and we have seen shorter speeches than during most such debates, but some important points have been made. Oliver Mundell pointed out that, although it is not a contentious bill, it relates to

important principles. We must acknowledge that. Neil Findlay reinforced that point and recalled the results of the survey carried out earlier in the parliamentary session, which should disturb us all. Gil Paterson noted that the survey suggested that a number of people had chosen not to make complaints, perhaps out of fear of harming their careers. None of us should be willing to accept that.

The bill delivers on some of the recommendations made by the joint working group, which included members representing all the political parties. I hope that a process that started and was completed consensually demonstrates that the whole Parliament wants to address longstanding and important injustices.

The bill has enjoyed cross-party support. The principle is that everyone has a right to work in an environment that is free of harassment. The legislation is a signal that we want to take the issue of sexual harassment seriously. I hope that these points also enjoy the same level of cross-party support.

The bill opens up a route for complaints about historical conduct that was previously unavailable to one group of staff: those who wished to complain that they had been harassed by the MSPs they worked for. This is not a question of retrospectively applying a new standard. It has never been acceptable to sexually harass a staff member.

The bill will allow the Parliament to hold its members to account when sexual harassment of MSP staff has occurred or been alleged in the past. It opens up an additional route of independent investigation, supplementing existing employment rights and remedies to which staff have access.

The Parliament has, or certainly should have and should aim to have, a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment. Such conduct brings the Parliament into disrepute, and there is now a compelling public interest in bringing these past cases within the commissioner's remit.

I am aware that there will be more substantive speeches in the next debate, so I am keen not to use all the time available. I will close by once again thanking those who have taken part in the development, scrutiny and passage of the bill and have recognised its importance. I also thank all members for the consensual approach that they have taken. I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the committee and invite members to support the motion at decision time.

International Women's Day 2021

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We are running quite early on business, but we will move to the next item, which is a debate on international women's day 2021 #ChooseToChallenge. I invite all members who wish to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:52

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): In a year when we have had precious little to celebrate, I am delighted to have the opportunity to recognise the amazing achievements of women across Scotland.

We all owe an incredible debt of gratitude to our health and social care workforce, the majority of whom are women. They have been on the front line in our battle against Covid-19, and they are leading our recovery, administering the first dose of the vaccine to 1,688,808 people as of today. They have worked tirelessly and under intense pressure to provide the best possible care. Their efforts are nothing short of heroic. That is why we have allocated £5 million to enhance wellbeing support services for health and social care staff, and we have also provided a thank you payment of £500 to health and social care staff to recognise their extraordinary work.

I want to express my appreciation of the women across Scotland who have had to juggle childcare commitments with other responsibilities, as schools and childcare settings were shut to control the spread of the virus. That is not to say that men have not had to do that too, but we know that caring roles still predominantly fall to women. According to research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, in different gender couples women do considerably more childcare than their partners. During the first lockdown, mums were doing childcare for more than 10 hours each day, on average, along with four hours of housework.

I have heard from women about the guilt they felt as they struggled with home schooling, maintaining a happy healthy family and holding down paid work, when possible. In fact, that probably sums up my experience of much of the past year.

Our mental health is just as important as our physical health, and we all have to be kind to ourselves and others regarding what we can do in these extraordinary times, although I admit that I am not that great at following that advice myself.

From one mother to many other mums across the chamber and beyond, I want to say thank you

and tell you that what you have been doing is amazing, but hard. We are dealing with unprecedented circumstances, but we hope that those times will soon come to an end.

While I extend my sincere thanks to women across Scotland for their essential efforts, I want to recognise the inherent unfairness of the fact that women have had to bear the majority of the impacts. The pandemic has shone a harsh light on existing gender inequality in our country and on how deep-rooted gender biases restrict opportunities for women.

The extra caring responsibilities that women are undertaking are having a profound impact on their ability to take on paid work. When combined with the pandemic's impact on areas of the economy with a mainly female workforce, such as tourism and hospitality, Covid-19 threatens to undo much of the progress that we have made towards women's workplace equality. We must take action to mitigate that, as we are. We have prioritised the reopening of early learning and childcare, because of the crucial role that it plays in supporting children and families. We remain committed to the roll-out of 1,140 hours of free, high-quality childcare for all three and four-year-olds and have provided councils with £567 million of additional funding in the draft budget to support that.

We are reviewing the actions within our "A Fairer Scotland for Women: Gender Pay Gap Action Plan" to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and support women through the economic recovery from Covid-19. In November last year, we launched a new women returners programme and an updated workplace equality fund. The women returners programme will support women who have had a career break back into work, and the workplace equality fund will encourage employers to invest in advancing their diversity and inclusion practices.

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government and I established the social renewal advisory board to consider how we can emerge from the pandemic a fairer and more prosperous Scotland. The board brought together equality experts, third sector stakeholders and local government to provide advice to the Scottish Government on putting equality and human rights at the heart of our recovery.

That work is essential to ensure that when we emerge from the pandemic we have not lost any of the gains that we have made. We need to do more to end the inequality that caused the problems to exist in the first place. I thank the members of the board for all their hard work. We are considering their recommendations carefully and Ms Campbell and I will respond to the report in due course.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary passed too quickly on health, before I could make an intervention, so forgive me. An excellent thing that the Government could do in the week of international women's day is to announce that it will fund mesh-injured women to travel to the US to have full mesh removal. Will the cabinet secretary advocate for that in cabinet, within the budget, so that women who need that service and cannot get it in Scotland can have that paid for by the national health service?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I recognise the work that Neil Findlay has done on that issue over many years. As he knows, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is looking at that closely. She wants to be able to work with the women and across the chamber, as she has done, to bring those events to a satisfactory resolution. I am sure that she will continue to work with Mr Findlay and the women and deliver that as she—or her successor; whoever will be the health secretary after the election—goes forward.

The pandemic is not impacting just women's ability to take on paid work. During the pandemic, referrals to services for women and girls experiencing violence and abuse rose. I am deeply concerned by that and make it very clear that violence against women and girls will not be tolerated. We are working to ensure that front-line services continue to support adults and children who are experiencing gender-based violence. That is why, last year, we allocated an additional £5.75 million to organisations including Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland to ensure that services could meet increased demand.

Those are just a few of the ways in which women have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. More impacts are emerging and we are working closely with stakeholders to identify and mitigate them as quickly as possible. We cannot be content with simply mitigating inequality. This year's international women's day theme is choose to challenge gender inequality. We must challenge the systems and biases that enable gender inequality to persist.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I hope that the cabinet secretary agrees that that should include challenging the systems in this Parliament, because we can see that younger women and, in particular, women with families feel that it is not as family friendly a workplace as it set out to be in 1999.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As someone who did not get any maternity leave when I had my two children, I absolutely take on board that point. We have probably hyped up how family friendly we were right at the start, and we are now finding out that the Parliament set-up does not live up to the

hype. That is our responsibility and for us all to work on.

I recognise that some aspects have moved on since I had my children, but there are still a number of ways in which we could do better as a Parliament. The whole Parliament can reflect on that in the next parliamentary session.

We have taken action across Government to choose to challenge gender inequality at its very core. Last year, a United Nations study indicated that 90 per cent of people hold at least one bias against women in relation to politics, economics, education, violence or reproductive rights. As part of our choosing to challenge harmful attitudes towards gender equality in Scotland, we commissioned Zero Tolerance to develop a model for a what works gender institute. I am delighted that Zero Tolerance will publish its results on 8 March, and I look forward to moving into the next phase of work soon.

We are choosing to challenge gender inequality in education through the work of the gender equality task force in education and learning, which is chaired by the Deputy First Minister. The task force is developing key interventions and actions to further embed gender equality in all aspects of our education system.

We are choosing to challenge gender stereotypes in the media, too, through funding for Gender Equal Media Scotland to research sexism and gender inequality in the media and to make recommendations on what future work could be undertaken.

Much of that work has stemmed from the recommendations of the First Minister's national advisory council on women and girls over the past three years. I highly commend and thank the advisory council members for all their work.

As the international women's day theme states, we must choose to challenge gender inequality, and we must choose to challenge ourselves to do more. The First Minister established the national advisory council on women and girls to do just that—to be a critical friend to the Scottish Government and to challenge us to be bolder in our actions to progress gender equality.

In its 2019 report on policy coherence, the advisory council made recommendations on how the Scottish Government can better ensure that gender equality is considered in the design of every policy, the calculation of every budget and the implementation of every service that we provide. I am delighted that, in December last year, as part of our response, we established the directorate for equality, inclusion and human rights to bring increased status to equality and human rights in the Scottish Government. One of the priorities for the new directorate is the

development of a renewed and ambitious mainstreaming strategy, which will incorporate the recommendations made by the national advisory council on women and girls as part of wider work to weave equality and human rights into all that the Scottish Government does.

I thank some of the women who will leave Parliament at the end of the parliamentary session and, in particular, my Cabinet sisters. Roseanna Cunningham has dedicated herself to public service over many years in the Scottish Parliament and at Westminster. Jeane Freeman might have served for only one session, but what an impact she has had through the establishment of Social Security Scotland and during the Covid crisis. We can all reflect on the thoughtfulness, kindness and compassion that my friend and colleague Aileen Campbell shows when she determines her politics. We should have more of that in politics, rather than less, and I am sad to see her go.

On that sad but reflective note, I thank all the women who have contributed to this past session of the Scottish Parliament and congratulate them on everything that they have achieved. I look forward to hearing from them today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Members should note that the minute and second display on the clocks will start working now—not that it was a problem for you, cabinet secretary. It is to assist members. There is some time in hand, although I know that members get anxious if they do not know how much time they have used.

That will not affect Rachael Hamilton, however, as she is at home. I call Ms Hamilton to open for the Conservatives.

16:05

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am delighted to open for the Scottish Conservatives in this international women's day debate. Like others in the chamber, I am committed to ensuring that harassment, sexism, misogyny and discrimination against women are rooted out. Instead of paying lip service, we should be delivering meaningful change.

This year's theme of #ChooseToChallenge is more important than ever. Today, I choose to challenge inequality, ending domestic violence and calling out gender bias. This past year has been more challenging than ever for women and girls, and pressures involving employment, caring responsibilities, education and finances have all disproportionately affected women, with Covid exacerbating what are already deeply engrained inequalities.

As Dr Sara Reis, the head of research and policy at the Women's Budget Group, highlighted, "Women started this crisis from a position of economic disadvantage."

Furthermore, women tend to be more exposed to the risk of catching Covid through the sectors in which they work. In particular, 77 per cent of front-line workers are women, and that poses significant risks.

Engender and other women's organisations have highlighted the multitude of ways in which Covid-19 threatens to roll back women's equality. It has been estimated by the UN that women's equality is due to be set back by some 25 years. Looking at the employment picture, we can see why that is the case. A woman in Scotland is twice as likely to be made redundant as a result of Covid as a man, because of the structural differences in their life circumstances.

Statistics from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs show that, in most countries and regions of the United Kingdom, more women than men were furloughed as at 31 July 2020, when the first wave of unemployment occurred. I welcome the announcement in the budget to extend furlough until the end of September. Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer also extended the self-employment scheme to a further 600,000 people who were previously excluded from claiming it. That is important for women because, since 2008, 58 per cent of newly self-employed people have been women.

As we turn to recovery, for young women, for the first time employees aged 23 and 24 will be able to earn a national living wage of £8.20. We must remain committed to a clear and concise plan for recovery to protect jobs in key sectors, particularly for women.

Moving on to the subject of domestic abuse, an integral message of international women's day is to end all forms of violence against women and girls. It remains a distressing fact that, in today's society, domestic abuse persists across the world. Worryingly, domestic abuse is on the rise in Scotland. The latest domestic abuse statistics for Scotland show that the number of incidents recorded by Police Scotland has been rising over the past three years.

We know that domestic abuse is not always physical violence; it can also manifest as coercive and controlling behaviour. Financial abuse remains a huge issue that can be unnoticeable to the friends and family of the victim. Women's Aid published its report on "The Economics of Abuse" in 2019. It found that nearly a third of respondents said that their access to money during their relationship was controlled by the perpetrator. Further to that, more than two fifths of all

respondents felt that the abuse had negatively impacted on their long-term employment prospects.

Having spoken to Border Women's Aid, my fantastic local women's support charity, I can see the great work that it is doing to provide support, advice and a safe space for women. If I am lucky enough to be re-elected, I want to help it to access longer-term funding, with a view to increasing access to more single-person accommodation.

In summing up, perhaps the cabinet secretary could address what the Scottish Government is doing to assess the impact of lockdown on domestic abuse and to consider funding allocations that will improve local services and fund refuges in future.

Lastly, I want to touch briefly on the work of the United Kingdom Government, which is improving equality. Let us take women's pay and employment: the UK Conservative Government has overseen a record low in the gender pay gap pre-pandemic. In 2019, the UK's gender pay gap for all employees fell to 17.3 per cent from 27.5 per cent when the survey first began in 1997. We introduced regulations that mean that all large employers must now report their own gender pay gap data.

The Conservative Government also introduced shared parental leave. From April 2015, both parents in the UK have been able to have parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child, which allows up to 50 weeks of leave with 37 weeks of statutory pay between them in place of maternity leave and pay. There is undoubtedly more work to do and, as we emerge from Covid, we have to ensure that we accelerate the narrowing of the pay gap and do more to place women at the heart of our Covid recovery.

I close with some words from Ms Anderson—the founder of the Cova Project in Australia, which helps girls who are experiencing poverty and disadvantage due to a lack of financial resources and access to basic necessities—who says that

"Feminism isn't about making women stronger, women are already strong, it's about changing the way the world perceives that strength."

With this year's theme of #ChooseToChallenge in mind, let us challenge damaging and negative perceptions about women in order to change and show that very strength.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Elaine Smith to open for Labour. This is Ms Smith's last speech in the chamber. I never thought that I would be saying that, Ms Smith.

16:11

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, with regard to my Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill and trade unions.

The theme for international women's day this year is, as we know, #ChooseToChallenge—to celebrate women's achievements, raise awareness of bias and take action for equality. Action is still needed, as we have not achieved sex equality in society, banished misogyny or elected a 50:50 chamber here.

I will reflect on that point as I open for Scottish Labour in my last speech after 22 years of service as an MSP and as one of the 99ers. I am pleased that my sisters Johann Lamont and Pauline McNeill will also speak in the debate.

More than two decades ago, Labour achieved significant women's representation in the new Scottish Parliament by taking radical positive action in our selection procedures. In my original candidate interview, I noted that,

"In 1918 the suffragettes won votes for women, 80 years later, 82% of MPs are men."

The number has improved a bit, but it is clear what difference having a critical mass of women representatives makes in tackling sex-based inequality and delivering legislation that would not be a priority for men, on issues such as breastfeeding, period poverty, childcare, domestic abuse and the whole spectrum of violence against women, including trafficking, prostitution and pornography.

Recent controversies around decisions on funding for Women's Aid refuges and services remind us that women fought long and hard for specialist services for women and children who suffer from abuse at the hands of violent men. Sadly, those services are needed even more during this pandemic.

Violence and the threat of it continue at home and abroad, in war zones with brutal sexual violence against women who dare to defend their sex-based rights—such as the shocking hanging of an effigy of the Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and feminist Carmen Calvo—and online through threats and name calling, which feminists across all parties in the chamber experience. We must choose to challenge all of that.

On action for employment equality, I first saw what sex discrimination at work looked like as a young woman, when I was an equality trade union rep working for a council. At that time, the vast majority of women were employed in the low-paid clerical and admin grades, and there was an all-male cast of chief officers. I realised then what

many feminist Labour and trade union women already knew—that women would have to fight relentlessly for every advance in their jobs, wages and conditions and to keep the sex-based rights that they had already achieved. It is an age-old story.

Coatbridge poet Janet Hamilton, a working-class woman who was born in 1795, did not learn to write until she was 50, and then she let rip. Here is an extract from her poem, "A Lay of the Tambour Frame", on women's work:

"Why quail, my sisters, why,
As ye were abjects vile,
When begging some haughty brother of earth
'To give you leave to toil?'
It is tambour you must,
Naught else you have to do,
Though paupers' dole be of higher amount
Than pay oft earned by you."

Over the past year, much of the public engagement in this building, including bringing in community groups, supporting third sector projects, learning about campaigns, meeting trade unions and working with cross-party groups—which engagement has enriched our experience as MSPs and informed our decisions—has gone. The Scottish Parliament must get that engagement back.

At the women's dinners that I have hosted in Parliament over many years, we have heard from a diverse range of women campaigners, including the young women who successfully tackled discrimination over bra size prices. We have also heard about the serious issue of the importance of women-only spaces, which was recently discussed with ex-Cornton Vale governor Rhona Hotchkiss. Women MSPs have attended the events on a cross-party basis, and I hope that my good friend from way back before we were MSPs, Rhoda Grant, will host the dinners in the future and might consider taking forward my right to food (Scotland) bill, if she is re-elected. No pressure.

Public services, on which women depend both as workers and service users, have been lost along with a collapsing community infrastructure. Building back better must mean fair work, including sustainable, flexible working policies and packages and meaningful equality impact assessments. In addition, as the cabinet secretary said, academic and statistical evidence confirms that women in Scotland have faced a disproportionate impact from Covid-19 in areas such as home schooling, unpaid caring, job losses and food insecurity, to name but a few.

We know that women remain underrepresented in public life, are paid less than men, endure violence at the hands of men and suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and power.

However, we also know that women will come up with solutions, as we have always had to do.

The pandemic has imposed great challenges on our next generation, with UN Women estimating that the pandemic will set women's equality back 25 years. Young women, including my niece Olivia and my son's partner, Charlie, who are both nurses working at the front line, my niece Emilie, who is a young graduate adjusting to home working, and my wee goddaughter Kassi, who is in primary 7 and is being commended for her online school work, are Scotland's future. It is important that they and our next generation of women know of the women who went before them, paving the way forward by fighting for women's rights for equality and against sex discrimination. Those rights were hard won and must not be given up. Do we choose to challenge? We do not have a choice and nor does the next generation, because, if we do not challenge, our rights will disappear.

It is traditional in a last speech to place on record some thanks, so I will do so before I close. I will start by thanking all the people who work in the Parliament—in particular, the staff who supported me when I was Deputy Presiding Officer. I thank Adele Black and the staff who have been working with me recently as Labour's business manager, my election agent Barbara Diamond, my local party, and all my own staff members and volunteers over the years. I thank my current staff, Chris Costello, Callum Jamieson and Katrina Faccenda. Katrina is the chair of the Campaign for Socialism, of which I was convener for many years. I also thank Ann Henderson, who has worked in the Scottish Parliament on and off since 1999. She challenged gender stereotypes as a young woman train driver and, more recently, was the second ever female rector of the University of Edinburgh. Lesley Dobbin must be one of the longest-serving MSP staff members, having worked with me for more than two decades and having supported me as a friend and colleague. Lesley deserves my thanks on the record for that.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Elaine Smith: Presiding Officer, can I take an intervention, or do you wish me to finish?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was going to say that I thought members knew that it is protocol, although not the law, that we try to let members who are making their last speech go uninterrupted.

Fulton MacGregor: I did not know that, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I know that you did not. Elaine Smith is such a lady, she will take your intervention.

Fulton MacGregor: Presiding Officer, I think that you might now realise why I wanted to get to my feet before Elaine Smith finishes. Elaine and I are, so far, the only two people in this Parliament to have represented Coatbridge and Chryston, which we both agree is the best constituency. While she is thanking people, I want to put on record my thanks to her.

I have always respected Elaine Smith for the work that she has done in the constituency, but I have come to really respect her over the past five years for the work that she has done. It is fitting that her final speech should be such a powerful one about women, as she is always fighting. As the current MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston, I thank her for all that she has done for Coatbridge and Chryston since the inception of the Parliament, in 1999.

Presiding Officer, I hope that you understand why I sought to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have redeemed yourself, Mr MacGregor.

Elaine Smith: I am very glad that I took that intervention.

Finally, I offer a special thank you to my mum, Moira, my sister, Siobhan, and my mother-in-law, Rita, for all their help, particularly with essential and much-valued childcare, which made it possible for me to be part of the Scottish Parliament in the beginning. Last, but far from least, I thank my very supportive husband, Vann, and my son, Vann.

It has been an honour and a privilege—as well as a challenge, at times—to represent my home area of Coatbridge and Chryston, and, latterly, Central Scotland, as a Scottish Labour MSP since 1999. I wish our new leader, Anas Sarwar, my MSP comrades and sisters, and all the MSPs who are standing down—particularly the class of '99—all the best for the future.

I will finish with the words of Clara Zetkin, who, at the international conference of working women in 1910, proposed the famous motion to celebrate women annually on an international basis:

“The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If all interventions are like that, I see no problem in members taking them.

16:21

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The theme of this year's international women's day, #ChooseToChallenge, is thought provoking and motivating. Those of us who are privileged enough to be in Parliament have a duty to challenge.

There is a real responsibility on those of us with the privilege of choice to use it, but, of course, even in 2021, fewer than 25 per cent of parliamentarians around the world are women. In the face of such glacial progress, we must choose to challenge any and all systems that perpetuate such underrepresentation.

Trump may be gone, but his disgusting macho politics is not. His misogynistic language was common knowledge before he became President, and the same applies to Brazil's President Bolsonaro. When so-called leaders normalise misogynistic language and behaviour, there is no choice—we must challenge it.

Let us choose to challenge a system that means that women in Venezuela and around the globe cannot afford contraception. That is a system that makes it very hard for women to choose to challenge. It is a system that deprives women of agency and choice.

We must choose to challenge a system that sees too many women's sports receive a fraction of the media coverage that those of their male counterparts receive and therefore a fraction of the opportunities to earn through endorsements and advertising. When he was hosting the London Olympic games as mayor, Boris Johnson said:

“there are semi-naked women playing beach volleyball ... glistening like wet otters”.

Women's athleticism, ability, skill and success are often totally overlooked, and the focus on how women look, rather than on what they do, persists.

Let us choose to challenge the invisibility of women's achievements, past and present. Let us choose to challenge the proliferation of statues of male slave owners and the lack of acclaim and acknowledgement of women who have excelled in many humanitarian endeavours, such as Elsie Inglis, Frances Melville and Flora Murray.

Elaine Smith: Members probably thought that I had spoken my last word.

On the way down the hill today, I noticed that almost all the quotes on the Parliament's wall are from men. There is only one quote from a woman. Perhaps the Parliament should consider that.

Alison Johnstone: Thank you. That point is well made, and I agree whole-heartedly.

As the cabinet secretary said, in many ways, it has taken a pandemic for us to recognise the brilliant women in our midst. Nurses make up 42 per cent of the national health service workforce, and almost 80 per cent of nurses are women. About 85 per cent of the social care workforce is women. Those incredible women have played a major part in Scotland's efforts to challenge Covid-19. Their work, day in and day out, since long

before the pandemic is always challenging health inequality and ensuring that each patient and person with whom they work receives the best care. We need to value them and pay them properly. Professor Linda Bauld and Professor Devi Sridhar have become household names. They have been the voices of calm expertise and reason on which we have all come to rely.

Let us choose to challenge the fact that this Parliament has a long way to go, and work to do, to properly represent the people of Scotland; challenge the lack of women here and in local government across the country; challenge the way that things are done when it means that women who have been involved in politics feel that they have to leave because they cannot spend enough time with their children and loved ones; challenge the timing of meetings when it means that those with caring duties, who are overwhelmingly women, cannot attend; challenge the fact that single parents, of whom 92 per cent are women, cannot go to the pub to do the networking that makes promotion or political selection more likely; challenge the shameful fact that we live in a country in which proof of rape is required for a woman to receive child tax credits for a third child; and challenge the discrimination, bullying and harassment that women of colour, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer women, disabled women and refugee women face in the workplace as well as the multiple barriers that prevent them from entering the labour market in the first place.

In many instances, women are taking on unpaid work on top of their paid employment, but too often that is not recognised, appreciated or even noticed because that type of work is not valued—it is not even viewed as work, despite the huge contribution that women's unpaid labour makes to the economy. The term “second shift” was invented by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in the 1970s to describe the household and childcare duties that follow a day's work for women. Forty years later, we are still trying to tackle the persistent gender imbalance that sees women taking on the majority of domestic and care work. Let us choose to challenge that inequality so that we can improve the lives of the women who experience it today and prevent future generations having to fight the same battles.

I, too, thank those women who will not be standing for election again, and I wish them all the very best in all that they go on to do. I know that they will continue to make a difference wherever they are.

16:27

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Equality is one of the four founding principles of the Scottish Parliament and it should be at the

core of everything that we do here, yet more than 20 years into the Parliament, many challenges remain. We undoubtedly still have work to do.

In November, we spoke about problems around violence against women and life-ruining crimes and hideous harassment, which are problems that must be addressed globally and closer to home. I choose to challenge domestic abuse and gender-based violence against women and girls, and I do so frequently.

Of course, those are not the only challenges that women face. Many have said that the pandemic has turned back the clock on gender equality. It is true that negative impacts have fallen disproportionately on women. Job losses and income reductions have been widespread. An International Monetary Fund report highlighted that women are more likely than men to work in social sectors, including retail, tourism and hospitality, where lockdown has been most acutely felt.

The true value of care has come into the limelight, professionally and domestically, and the responsibility to manage schooling at home has, without question, hit women harder. Many people found themselves between a rock and a hard place, juggling impossible burdens and unrealistic expectations. These problems are not new; there is nothing unfamiliar in what I have described. The relationship between women and work has always been fragile, often because of where caring responsibilities naturally fall.

As we have just seen during the course of the pandemic, those extra expectations are just supposed to be absorbed, but the working world is full of rigid expectations and counter-productive policies such as those being fought by the women against state pension inequality.

According to a Trades Union Congress survey that was published in January, more than seven in 10 women who applied for furlough after the latest school closures had their requests turned down. That forces women to sacrifice pursuing progression—evidence bears that out. Research by Engender found that representation in positions of power is still dominated by men. Women make up 52 per cent of the Scottish population, but we account for only 36 per cent of public body chief executives, 13 per cent of senior police officers and 6 per cent of major newspaper editors, and there are no women as chief executive officers of Scotland-based FTSE 100 or 250 companies.

Politics sees much of the same. There are concerns, which I feel are valid, that the gender balance in politics might be going in the wrong direction. Too many women have made the decision to step down, explicitly because sitting in Holyrood is incompatible with family life and attracts undue and insufferable abuse. Before the

pandemic, a family-friendly Parliament amounted to a commitment to avoiding formal business running on into the evenings and to having a crèche on site for staff. That follows an exodus of women from public office in the run-up to the 2019 general election, which was largely motivated by disgraceful online vitriol that reinforced the clear and urgent need for more to be done to tackle misogynistic harassment.

Perhaps this week more than most, it seems as though the political world is not doing enough to ensure that a woman's place is in Parliament. This is where we make laws and set examples. Taking inspiration from this year's international women's day theme, we can choose to challenge the Parliament to be better than that: to learn the lessons of the past 12 months; make hybrid operation a long-term reality, which lets women in rural and non-central-belt communities take part and balance family life; and take the opportunity to make things better for the future. This is a moment to change things and we should grasp it.

Finally, as others have done, to all the members who are standing down, I express my good wishes for whatever the future holds for them.

16:31

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): #ChooseToChallenge is the theme for this year's international women's day. Challenge is healthy, helpful and, when constructive and persistent, it is ultimately what gets things done. From challenge comes change, and challenge always helps us to make better decisions.

Challenge is necessary. I get the appeal of consensus, compliance, conformity and not making a fuss, because consensus is comfortable. However, make no mistake—consensus is most valuable when it is arrived at after debate, discussion and, yes, challenge. When that happens, it is worth substantially more than the warm, cosy feeling that comes from being surrounded only by those of the same mind as our own.

Therefore, let me salute challenging women—in particular, those who are leaving our Parliament. They are the women who persistently speak out for women and girls, even when doing so is difficult, uncomfortable and comes at a cost because, in doing so, they are accused of not caring about others or, worse, of harming others.

I commend women who have different beliefs, political or philosophical positions, but come together and respectfully and honestly work for a shared goal.

I acknowledge women who centre women and girls in the work that they do, as well as women

who campaign and fight against the injustices that women face in this stubbornly and persistently patriarchal society, such as the undervaluing of care—paid and unpaid, which is predominantly carried out by women—pregnancy and maternity discrimination, the gender pay gap and limiting sexist stereotypes.

I acknowledge and applaud women who campaign to end male violence against women in all its forms: sexual harassment, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, so-called honour crimes, sexual assault, rape, trafficking, stalking and prostitution.

I thank women such as Elaine Smith, who understand that women's liberation is not complete, and that the world right now is not as safe as it should be for women and girls and is certainly not equal.

I particularly acknowledge older women, who have spent decades fighting and to whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude for all that they achieved in securing women's rights and freedoms, which many of us now take for granted and perhaps sometimes forget had to be fought for.

To women who have shared their personal trauma publicly in order to illustrate the need to uphold women's rights, and have been shamefully accused of weaponising their trauma, I say that I understand the toll that it takes. I am sorry that that happened to you; thank you for your strength.

I celebrate the women in our communities, in our council chambers, in our Parliaments and in our Government who put their heads above the parapet in the face of patronising dismissal, ridicule, sexism, hostility and, in some cases, violent misogynistic abuse and threats of physical harm. I say to them: keep going, keep speaking out; keep taking action; I see you all; you make a difference; solidarity—and thank you, sisters.

16:35

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased that I am able to participate in what is an important debate to mark international women's day. As the father of twin girls, Keziah and Ellie, I want them as they grow up to live on an equal footing with men. I therefore welcome this year's theme of #ChooseToChallenge because, if we all choose to call out gender bias and inequality and to celebrate women's achievements, we can help to create an inclusive world.

The role of women in Scottish society has changed more during the 20th century than at any other time in recorded history, as women have become fully enfranchised members of society. Today, women contribute significantly across many sectors of Scottish life.

This week, I am pleased to support a motion congratulating Debora Kayembe, resident of Scotland since 2011 and human rights lawyer, on starting her role as rector of the University of Edinburgh, which is one of the UK's most prestigious institutions. She is the first black woman, the first African immigrant and the third woman since 1858 to be named rector. I was delighted to read that her focus while she is rector will be to challenge inequalities. I hope that such role models can help to instil confidence and encourage girls to be aspirational and to consider themselves capable of becoming a lawyer, an engineer, an athlete or even a politician.

However, there is still no room for complacency. According to the World Economic Forum, sadly none of us will see gender parity in our lifetime; nor, likely, will many of our children. Many inequalities between men and women are well established. We know that women are more likely than men to be out of employment due to caring responsibilities and more likely to move into part-time employment after having a child. Other research on barriers to maternal employment has cited a lack of suitable jobs, childcare issues, a preference for caring for children, a lack of qualifications and experience, and issues in organising transport. Mothers are more likely than fathers to sacrifice employment, for a variety of reasons—including the fact that fathers often receive a higher salary, as well as social expectations around gender roles. Research has shown that mothers who do return to employment often shift to lower-paid jobs and that, even if they continue in the same job, they are less likely to gain promotion.

We also know that the pandemic has made inequalities even greater. As has already been mentioned by a number of speakers, women are more likely to be impacted by job disruption and furlough, due to working in sectors such as hospitality and retail. According to the Office for National Statistics, women did two thirds of additional childcare duties and spent more time on unpaid work and less time on paid work than men did during lockdown 1. The ONS has also shown that women did more cooking and washing than men did, and were more likely to be unpaid carers. Certainly, from my own experience, I know that that is true—not only in my household but in those of many of the other parents to whom I talk in the school playground. Such problems are even more acute for single parents, of whom 90 per cent are women.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives support the roll-out of 1,140 hours of free childcare, and are concerned that that has not been implemented properly by the Government. An Audit Scotland report published in March 2020 highlighted that, with just five months remaining, the Government

still had to recruit half the required staff, and a significant amount of the building infrastructure was still to be completed.

We also know that in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, women are often left behind.

We also need to look at the way that we work—not only in Parliament but in society generally. I support Equate Scotland's call on Government, employers and trade unions to capitalise on the benefits, the lessons and the many sacrifices that have been made through Covid-19 by offering—and actively promoting to all staff—more rounded, sustainable and flexible working policies and practices.

Many issues that affect women's equality still need to be challenged, and the Conservatives are committed to achieving equality of opportunity for women in all aspects of life. We will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that any sexism and discrimination against women is rooted out.

Finally, I say a fond farewell to the women MSPs who have been part of the Parliament for many years. It has been a privilege for me to get to know some of them and to work closely with others. Those who are leaving, across the various parties, will be missed, and I wish them all well in whatever happens next in their lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Gail Ross. I understand that this is Ms Ross's final speech.

16:41

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): As we have heard, the subject of international women's day this year is #ChooseToChallenge, and challenge I will. In fact, I have been quite challenging all my life, as I am sure many people who know me would agree.

Presiding Officer, as you know, politics is a gey coarse game, and it seems to be especially challenging for women. Whatever we do, we have to work twice as hard to be seen as being even half as good. We have to balance having a thick skin with caring; giving ourselves up to the public with maintaining our privacy; staying loyal to our party with having good friends from other parties; and being a person with still being seen as an object. Being a councillor was a hard job, but being a member of Parliament is a different thing altogether. It is a tough role and a demanding role, but it is a rewarding role.

I have challenged and been challenged in return, but the biggest challenge for me—and, indeed, for some others, as we have heard and as we will hear—has been in trying to influence or, at least, to educate people on the difficulties of being

present in the Scottish Parliament building for so many days every week.

In that sense, the Parliament has to have a long hard look at how it encourages people—especially women—to become elected members. There has to be more flexibility in work practices, and remote and virtual working—which I was told was not possible only a month before we were forced into that way of working by the pandemic—must become the norm. Otherwise, more people like me and others who will speak in the chamber and remotely will be forced into making a decision either to leave or not to stand at all. That is not good for our democracy.

This parliamentary session—the past five years—has been a rich tapestry of experiences. From speaking at the Presiding Officer's Burns supper to writing poems in the style of Julie Andrews for a *Holyrood Magazine* event, such experiences have been made all the richer by the people who have surrounded me.

It would not be a final speech without a copious amount of thank yous. With your indulgence, Presiding Officer, I would like to address those thanks personally. I should say that, in addition to the women on the list, there are quite a few men who could be mentioned—just not today.

First, I thank my colleague and friend Rona Mackay for giving up her spot in the debate so that I could make this speech—my final speech—today.

I thank the people in my parliamentary team, who have been there to support me throughout the good times and the bad. They have enabled me to do the job. I owe them all—past and present members of the team—a huge debt of gratitude. Carrie, who had never worked for an MSP before, is now going on to be a trained counsellor. I am so proud of her. Kirsteen has not had an easy few years, but she has got me to the end, so I thank her. I say to Wee Kyla—you fair cheered up the office since you started, and you are never far from my thoughts.

I thank Christina McKelvie—a champion of equalities and human rights—for believing in me. Christina, I am thinking of you just now.

I thank Jeane Freeman, who has been mentioned already, for all that she has done. Quite simply, thank you.

To Emma Harper, I say that we did a good job of bookending the country at every event, agricultural show and meeting. We would tell people how we were working, north and south, at squeezing the central belt. We had some success and some very positive feedback.

Our First Minister and my boss, Nicola Sturgeon has been an inspiration to me for a lot of years—

ever since a chance meeting in Glasgow Queen Street station in the 1990s. She asked me to open her event at Eden Court theatre in Inverness; I misunderstood her text, so I had to write a speech the night before it. It still went down well, though. Being her parliamentary liaison officer and attending First Minister's question time preparation was an honour that will never be equalled for me. I never did manage to drop in a question about bus strikes in France, but I still reckon that she can take me out for that lunch. During the past year, in particular, her commitment and dedication to steering Scotland through the pandemic has been nothing less than superhuman. I have no doubt that the First Minister will lead Scotland to her independence. Thank you, First Minister.

I have more fond words for my two very special friends—the members of my coven—but I have been advised that the sort of language that I would use is not appropriate in the chamber, and we already know that it is offensive on Twitter, so I will stop there. Those friends are Jenny Gilruth and Mairi Gougeon. It is a special thing to get to this stage of life and make friends that you wish you had known years ago. I will miss our gatherings and making our spells. I have laughed more times with them in the past five years than the number of bottles of prosecco we have shared. As you might be aware, Presiding Officer, that is a lot of laughs.

I thank the security staff, especially Audrey, who helped me to clean my dress on the day of the kirking of Parliament, and I thank Nejra, for always stopping for a chat, and the rest of the people in the hospitality and events teams.

My thanks go to every single person who sent me a message of support when I announced that I was standing down, and to all my friends and colleagues and every member of staff.

I cannot conclude this part of my life without thanking the women in my family. They have been there to pop over with dinners, to send Max to school, to pick him up, to get him to after school clubs or to be there with support, so Max says, "Thank you, Granny Mo, Granny Ru, Ruthie and Jacquelyn."

I have a confession to make: when I have sat in the chamber, I have written poems that were relevant to the subject that had been debated, then left them in the desk. I hope that when members have found them some made them smile and some made them think. This is the one that I would leave today, if I were in the chamber:

"No more will you see me
But you'll know that I'm still there
Sat with you in Margo's
Or passing on the stairs
Coffee in the Garden Lobby
Just won't be the same

But remember this is not goodbye
It's Til We Meet Again!"

The question remains: where is a woman's place? A woman's place is in the Scottish Parliament.

I wish the best of luck to everyone, for whatever the future may bring.

16:48

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I am not sure how I can follow that, but I thank Gail Ross and Elaine Smith. Both of whom, in their different ways, have played important parts in my parliamentary life—Gail, recently, as the deputy convener of the Public Petitions Committee. She is the good cop, most of the time, and is an excellent parliamentarian. How can I beat that? Her speech, as a backdrop, was fantastic.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate to mark international women's day. As I near the end of my time in Parliament, I am mindful of the privilege that I have had, as an MSP, to speak up and speak out for women. I celebrate the women across our communities who do that day in and day out.

Today is an opportunity to reflect on women's lives and the challenges that women here and globally face because of our sex. That does not happen because of how we look or how we dress, but because of who we are. Across the world, girls face forced marriage, child marriage, female genital mutilation, sex selection and rape in war. They are denied education and independence of action because of their sex.

I am here as a Labour elected member. Labour is a party that has understood, from the beginning of this Parliament, that women have been underrepresented in politics and that that underrepresentation is a consequence of sex discrimination. Therefore, I did not, and do not, take my job lightly.

I am proud that since the Parliament's inception women have taken their work seriously—none more so than the persistent and focused Elaine Smith, who spoke up so eloquently for women and those who are disadvantaged earlier, as she always has.

We need to understand fully how being a woman impacts on our health. Mesh has been mentioned, but mesh highlights other issues in which the experience of women has simply not been believed. It is a feature of women's health that the health system has not understood their experiences.

We need to understand how being a woman impacts on our life chances—how segregation in jobs, education and training have lifetime

consequences for women. We need to understand women's vulnerability to male violence, and that fear of male violence is an ever-present companion from our youth. We are anxious while walking home, alert while running in the park and aware, too, of what behaviour must be "managed" in the workplace.

We also need to understand that the realities of domestic abuse, sexual violence, coercive control and femicide dominate the lives of all too many women across the country. They frame the capacity of women to escape, and they underline the need for single-sex spaces where women might heal and learn.

Women's lives tell us why we need to invest in public services that see women's needs, as well as the many goals that women have in holding families and communities together. There are women who are carers, either paid or unpaid, and women who manage care for elderly parents and for their children. Now, in the teeth of a pandemic, and given what is to come, we must test all our budgets in order that we understand how women are disadvantaged and how women's inequality must be addressed in the coming period.

There has been progress, but there is a long way to go. We all have a responsibility to choose to challenge. My generation chose to challenge the notions that women were absent from positions of power because they were just not good enough; that if a woman just tried hard enough, she would get on; that women were uniquely suited to caring and to women's work; and that somehow women deserved what happened to them when they were the victims of male violence.

My generation also chose to challenge a definition of politics that excluded the experience of women's lives. It did not talk about childcare issues, it really did not talk about low pay, and it certainly did not talk about abuse and neglect and the systemic denial of women's rights. Those issues are now seen as mainstream in political life and as necessary to consider in anything that addresses inequality.

I will finish with two things. When I got involved in politics; when in this Parliament we spoke of women's rights; when my dear, departed sister Trish Godman spoke up about abuse of women through prostitution and trafficking—a system that is driven by the needs of men and that benefits men, by exploiting and not liberating the most vulnerable of women; when my dear friend Maria Fyfe spoke up about women's right to choose and about the need for, and importance of, women controlling their fertility; and when women have spoken up about women's inequality, it was because we wanted to change women's lives. I never imagined that I would be fighting at this

stage in my life, in Parliament, not just to change women's lives but to change what the very word "woman" means.

I choose to challenge. Women across the world know what sex discrimination is, and what it is to be a woman. The men who discriminate against and abuse women know what it is, too. There is a new generation of young women who know that. They feel silenced, perhaps not by arguments about what women's traditional roles were—against which we railed—but by men who not only tell them that they are wrong about their own lived experience, but that they, as men, know better. However, I am confident that there is a generation of young women who will choose to challenge the shifting sands on which all too many women, and particularly young women, now stand.

On international women's day, I and many of my sisters will support them every step of the way, as they challenge and demand their rights as young women, as we have done in the past. On international women's day, we celebrate all that women have done, and we celebrate the optimism about what is yet to happen for women.

16:54

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As many of us have said, the theme of this year's international women's day is "choose to challenge". It is good to see so many challenging women speaking today. They are women who speak truth to power, and women who say what needs to be said, even when it is uncomfortable—in fact, sometimes especially because it is uncomfortable.

There are those who would rather that we challenging women sat down and shut up. There have been folk like that throughout the ages, and they exist today: "Don't make a fuss", "Stop banging on", "Be nice", "Where's your smile?" and so on. There are people who demand that women apologise for men's bad behaviour, and men who promote only those in their likeness. There are people who turn a blind eye to inequality because they think that it does not affect them. Of course women's inequality affects them: it stymies the prosperity and wellbeing of every society that it stubbornly persists in.

I will use my short time in the debate to supply some challenges; I promise that, if we meet them, it will be good for all of us, men and women alike.

I challenge this country to do everything that it can to close the gender pay gap. I challenge everyone in this country to share caring and housework responsibilities equally between the sexes—not least you, John Martin. I challenge this country to end female sexual exploitation and violence against women in all its forms. I challenge

this country to reduce gender segregation in jobs in sectors such as care, technology, engineering and science. I challenge every party in the chamber to return 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women representatives in May. I challenge our Covid recovery to prioritise redressing the imbalance of the adverse effect on women and to commit to erasing the inequalities that have widened during the pandemic. I challenge us to put respect and consent at the core of everything that we teach our children about relationships. I challenge everyone to check their misogyny and, while they are at it, to challenge everyone else's misogyny. Finally, I challenge everyone to stop abusing women online and to take oxygen away from those who do.

If we meet those challenges, our economy will thrive. More women will pay more tax, which will be good for public spending. Our wellbeing index will soar, our health outcomes will be better, and better policy decisions will be made that will make life for everyone better. If it takes being labelled as a difficult or challenging woman to achieve those things, that suits me just fine.

Our society is all the better because of so-called difficult or challenging women throughout history. Challenging women have certainly made life better for women in Scotland. This Parliament is set to lose some of the most excellent of their number in three weeks' time—women in my party who have inspired and supported so many, including me: Ms Cunningham, Ms Watt, Ms Freeman, Ms Ross, Ms White, Ms Fabiani and Ms Campbell, who is in the chamber today. We will also lose women speaking today who represent other parties—women whom I have not always agreed with but who I greatly admire and respect: Ms Lamont and Ms Smith.

Happy international women's day. Here's to women who challenge. Where on earth would we be without you?

16:58

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): It is a privilege, as a father of three daughters, for me to join in this debate and celebrate the important, upcoming event of international women's day next week. It is indeed fortuitous that this is also fairtrade fortnight, given that women are a large part of the workforce in the developing world and, indeed, the British Commonwealth, in which I have an interest through the Scottish Parliament's branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

This year's international women's day campaign theme speaks of the responsibility that each of us shares to celebrate women's achievements by doing all that we can to promote greater visibility and opportunity, and by choosing not only to

recognise but to challenge the stereotypes and limitations that we see in society. International women's day is a collective drive, resting on all our shoulders, to call for greater inclusion. Not only should we challenge others in highlighting women's equality, but we should also prepare to be challenged ourselves—whether at home, in the workplace, in public or in private—to tackle gender bias and inequality, no matter how subtle or small.

Although progress has been made, it is clear that there is still a long way to go. According to Close the Gap, most low-paid work, which is often also precarious, tends to be taken up by women, many of whom need to balance earning and caring responsibilities. Instances of racism, prejudice and discrimination remain worryingly common and continue to disproportionately impact women.

Internationally, we continue to hear appalling reports of young schoolgirls being kidnapped in northern Nigeria. We hear about the issues facing women in other parts of the world, such as countries in the Arabian peninsula. In my time spent working overseas in countries recovering from civil war, such as Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, I have seen on the ground, for real, the hardship that women have endured simply to keep their families together, fed and watered. In Afghanistan in particular, women were denied education in past years.

At home, the impact of Covid-19 has been far reaching, but we cannot ignore its effect on women. Disruption to work has been widespread, and has affected women more keenly. The vast majority of front-line workers are women, who face greater risk to their physical and mental wellbeing as they continue to deliver essential services in the most challenging of circumstances.

The sectors that tend to be dominated by female workers, such as the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors, have suffered heavy losses that have resulted in damaging knock-on effects for women. Through the many months of home schooling and increased childcare responsibilities, the pressure on women to reduce their work hours has been more pronounced.

It is vital that the gains that have been made in furthering gender equality are not reversed. Global data from UN Women contains the warning that the pandemic could be responsible for wiping out 25 years of progress.

I believe that there is a renewed urgency to this year's international women's day. We need to challenge the barriers that women face and answer those calls with real, significant and lasting action. The pandemic has spotlighted the real risk in undervaluing women and the obligation on all of us—whether policy makers or not—to ensure that ground that has been gained is not lost.

Finally, I wish all our lady members who are leaving Parliament well. We shall miss their style, flair, good humour and intellect. Put simply, we shall miss them all.

17:02

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to mark international women's day on 8 March.

As colleagues have said, this year's theme is "Choose to challenge". The pandemic has certainly caused many challenges for women in Scotland and across the world. I appreciate the impact that Covid has had on women. That impact has been highlighted across the chamber in some pretty awesome contributions from the sisters—and the brothers, tae.

A challenged world is an alert world. From challenge comes change. Let us all choose to challenge, to support rights and freedoms, and to tackle misogyny. As the United Nations has noted:

"Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions—all day, every day."

Everyone has the choice to challenge stereotypes. We can choose to challenge and fight bias. We can broaden perceptions, improve situations and celebrate the achievements of women, including many in the Parliament today. It is important for us all to work to enable that to happen and to strive for empowerment and equality.

Members may recall that, in January last year, I brought a debate on United Nations resolution 1325, on women, peace and security. Resolution 1325 was passed unanimously by the United Nations Security Council. It was the first resolution of its kind, with the aim of specifically addressing the impact of war on women and the value of women in conflict resolution as conflict resolvers and women who choose to challenge conflict, hatred and discrimination.

In the Scottish Government's equally safe policy is the principle that all women and girls, regardless of background, race, religion or sexual orientation, should feel safe in their communities and empowered to take any opportunities, and to call out and challenge discrimination or hatred. Indeed, internationally, Scotland, working in partnership with the UN, has pledged practical and financial support for women and girls to achieve that goal and to learn peace-building and conflict-resolution skills. In so doing, women and girls will feel confident in challenging war and intolerance.

The Scottish Government and UN programme runs over three days and consists of talks, seminars and lessons. During the programme, women and girls have access to international

peacekeeping experts and female role models in positions of power and the opportunity to learn from one another. That includes learning about the fundamentals of peacekeeping, of challenging intolerance and of building consensus. The programme has been proved to have a lasting and positive impact on the individuals who take part and on the future of many war-affected areas of the world—it has hugely benefited Syria.

Our First Minister was the first world leader to address the UN General Assembly to discuss the importance of women playing our part, both at home and internationally. She spoke of the importance of societies and countries focusing on welfare and peace promotion and having an environment in which women can challenge stereotypes and promote tolerance.

There are many other ways in which the Scottish Government is promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. We have a gender-balanced Cabinet and equal representation on our public boards. All residents of Scotland have the right to vote in Scottish elections, including women who have leave to remain. Women in Scotland can stand for this Parliament, and it is important to note that Scotland has a dedicated minister for equalities and a commitment to upholding women's rights.

I again pay tribute to the work that the Scottish Government is undertaking through its introduction of legislation and policies, and through its wellbeing approach to government, to tackle gender inequality and empower women to challenge stereotypes and be the best that they can be.

Through challenge comes change:
#ChooseToChallenge.

17:06

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Today is a sad day in many ways. Women's equality has been considerably rolled back by the pandemic. Women are reverting to caring roles and taking the brunt of home schooling and of childcare. I endorse what Shirley-Anne Somerville said in her opening speech and thank all the women who have taken on those roles in all our lives, including in my own family. I worry about girls, whom I think will be further disadvantaged by the lack of time at school. That is a challenge for us all.

A recent Mumsnet survey of more than 1,500 women found that 79 per cent agreed that the responsibility for home schooling fell largely on them. The vast majority agreed that it was impossible to work uninterrupted when schools closed.

Women must be more strident and stronger than ever. Challenge is not a choice: it is a necessity because of the pandemic. Almost three quarters of working mothers who applied for furlough following the latest school closures had their requests turned down. Our working environments are not family friendly. The primary challenge for women legislators is to recognise that and to act on it in the next Parliament.

Sadly, as we have heard today, a number of incredible women MSPs from all parties are standing down, some because they have served very long shifts, others because the job of an MSP can compromise family life.

I want to talk about my Labour sister, Jenny Marra, who has made a huge contribution. She is a young talent and a radical voice for Dundee and her standing down is a loss to our party and to Parliament.

The wonderful Gail Ross is a bright, funny, easy-going person. We have heard from her over recent months about a possible revision to family-friendly policies. Aileen Campbell is a great minister who has earned the respect of all parties. She is standing down before her time and I wish her well in the future.

I am thinking of our early days in this place. I came in 1999, although I later had some time out. Many women struggled with young families as they tried to find their feet. Childcare was an issue then too. My dear friend Karen Gillon had her three children while in office. She had the office next to mine. We loved the fact that there was always a baby in a pram. Johann Lamont loved to come and visit because she liked to attend to the baby.

Shirley-Anne Somerville is right. We might have hyped up just how family friendly our Parliament was. Perhaps we have lost our way. I got married in 1999, the year when I was first elected. I was a Glasgow MSP and my husband was shocked by the long hours that I spent away from home. I have no children and can only imagine what it is like to try to bring up a young family as an MSP—I am sure that it is difficult for fathers too. I am surmising that it is no wonder that many women MSPs do not want to come to Parliament, and why the percentage of women MSPs has dropped to 34 per cent.

Another Labour sister, Johann Lamont, has just spoken in the way that she always does: with absolute fierceness and belief. I remember when Johann was a minister and she told me that she would sit with her red box at 6am at the pool side with her son, a champion swimmer, so that she could make sure that he did not lose out. She brought her feminism to her ministerial posts, and she is as funny as she is feisty, continually arguing

for sex-based rights for women. What a difference Johann Lamont has made to the Parliament.

We have also heard from the wonderful Elaine Smith, who is not frightened of anyone or anything. She has a huge amount of integrity. I know that if Elaine raises a point of order, it will be very thorough and pointed. She championed the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill and, more recently, the proposed food justice bill in Parliament. She has been a really strong voice in this place and she will be missed.

I have a huge amount of respect for the work that Mary Fee, who is not here, has done on justice and equality. When I met Mary in my first days here, she had the most folders of any MSP I had ever seen because of the many committees on which she served.

I also want to pay tribute to Roseanna Cunningham, Jeane Freeman, Maureen Watt, Linda Fabiani, Margaret Mitchell and Ruth Davidson, who are all leaving this place.

Finally, I want to talk about Sandra White, and how funny life is. We competed for Glasgow Kelvin, where I served for the first three sessions and she has served the past two. Never did I think that she and I would share a berth on a boat on the Mediterranean for a 14-hour journey to break the siege of Gaza. I will never forget when I said to her, "I feel so seasick, Sandra. If I do not come back in 15 minutes, would you make sure that there is not a by-election?" It is funny how life turns out, and I am sure that there is more to be written about that.

To be serious, when Emma Ritch wrote in Engender's publication "Gender Matters" that

"It's a very exciting time to be a feminist"

and asked us to imagine a

"2030 where all women in Scotland have more access to power, to resources, and to safety"

little did she know, and little did we know, that there would be an intervention—a national pandemic that would halt our plans to reach that target.

I think that I might have to wind up, Presiding Officer. I did not realise that my closing remarks would take so long.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can continue. I am enjoying this.

Pauline McNeill: It is important to recognise that we have lost some time and work that we might have done had there not been a national pandemic. It is incumbent on whoever is returned to Parliament and whatever Government is returned to make sure that women's rights and

family-friendly policies are at the very heart of the work of Parliament during its next session.

We know and all agree that women make up the vast majority of the workers in the care sector. It is time to call out such ingrained sex discrimination. We can start by paying those workers £15 an hour and letting them know that that is only the beginning.

Women's equality is a global issue and it is depressing to learn that violence against women by men is still a global problem. I have followed closely the rape and murder of women such as Libby Squire in Sheffield. By his own admission, the perpetrator was looking for a woman to have easy sex with and he preyed on her as she made her way home. That demonstrates that such violence is a sex-based crime. Women's safety is as live an issue as it was 40 or 50 years ago.

I conclude by paying tribute to all the women who have served in the Parliament, and to the wonderful speeches that have been made on international women's day. We have never been let down by Gillian Martin and Ruth Maguire in these debates. As women, we must make sure that we have strong voices, and that we will catch up on the rolling back of our achievements and rights during the next parliamentary session.

I wish you all well on international women's day.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call Alison Harris to speak for the Conservatives. I believe that this is also your final speech, Ms Harris.

17:14

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): It is a privilege to be closing today for the Conservatives. It is quite fitting that my final speech in the chamber will be to mark international women's day, particularly because of this year's theme, #ChooseToChallenge, which urges people to call out and challenge the gender bias and inequality that women face. A challenged world is an alert world, and from challenge comes change.

Individually, we are all responsible for our own thoughts and actions, all day, every day. This is the first time in my time in the Scottish Parliament that I have heard anyone use the word "responsible" or allude to personal responsibility. In the Parliament we are used to hearing about the rights of individuals, yet, if we all balanced our rights with responsibilities, perhaps, along with more work, the gender bias and inequality that surrounds us through all walks of life would become less prevalent.

We have heard some fantastic speeches this afternoon and it is safe to say that we all agree on the importance of achieving equality and making

Scotland a world leader when it comes to women's rights. It is a year since I last took part in a debate on international women's day, and since that day so much has changed in the world—more than any of us could have ever imagined. However, the core challenges faced by women at home and abroad remain much the same and, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, in some cases the challenges have even intensified.

Progress has been made, of that there is no doubt. The gender balance in the workplace is improving all the time, the pay gaps between men and women are narrowing and females are feeling more empowered to speak out about the issues that they face, but there is still so much work to do. Perhaps the founders of this important movement would be disappointed to learn that there is still a need to have such conversations, more than a century on from its creation. When I look back at early contributions on the issue, from when the meetings and marches started more than 100 years ago, I often wonder what those brave and trailblazing women would make of the situation that we have today. Looking around the chamber on occasions when it is full, we can see that there is more work to do. We have become very good at talking about the issue, but perhaps less good at ensuring that change actually happens.

Where do we start? Perhaps we need to go back to when our children are young. How often do we hear from parents and teachers that girls develop quicker, mature faster and perform better in the early years of school? At what point does that change, and why? Why does that advantage peel away and go into reverse by the time it comes to getting into the workplace? That underlines that we need to do more than address issues in the workplace; we need to start ensuring that equality becomes the norm from a far earlier stage.

This year, the theme of international women's day is challenging—not just challenging women to do the best they can, but challenging men to act and call out discrimination when they see it happening. #ChooseToChallenge is a great theme to have and I think that it should be an everyday theme, not just the theme for 2021.

Many inspirational quotes have been shared as we lead up to international women's day. I read one this week from pioneering sportswoman and leading voice of the feminist movement, Billie Jean King. It said:

"I have long said that women have been conditioned to want less. Women are supposed to be happy with the crumbs, but we deserve the cake, the icing, and the cherry on top."

Let us all use that as motivation to work together and ensure that by the next time this debate is held in Parliament there will be much to celebrate.

I thank all those members who have taken part in this year's debate, across the chamber and virtually. I will not be involved in next year's debate. However, this afternoon, let us celebrate females from across the globe.

This session of the Scottish Parliament has been exceptionally interesting and a very challenging time to be involved in politics. On a more personal level, over the past five years, #ChooseToChallenge has certainly featured in my daily parliamentary life. Over my time in Parliament, there have been many highlights that will always remain with me. It has been a privilege and honour to serve the people of Central Scotland region as a Scottish Conservative, especially those in my home town of Falkirk.

I put on record my thanks to all the committee clerks and to staff throughout the building who work so tirelessly to make life as easy as possible. I also thank my staff members; in particular, a special thanks goes to the other "A" in my office—namely, Aris. She has been my right-hand woman throughout this journey. I also thank my family and friends, because without their love and support I would not have been able to rise to this challenge.

I close by raising my hand high to show that I am committed to #ChooseToChallenge.

17:19

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): It is with mixed emotions that I rise to close the debate for the Government. I am pleased and proud to conclude a debate that has shown the Parliament at its best. We have heard powerful, thoughtful, considered and passionate speeches from women who have contributed a great deal to the betterment of our country. By their very presence here as MSPs, those women, regardless of their party, have chosen to challenge gender inequality because, despite more than 100 years of the franchise and many equality acts, women continue to be underrepresented in Parliaments around the world, including this one.

As well as feeling pleased and proud, I am sad, because this represents one of my final speeches in a Government debate as an MSP and a Government minister, and the end to my 14 years as an MSP representing Clydesdale and the south of Scotland draws ever closer.

I will use my time to reflect on achievements that have been delivered by this Government and Parliament and by female parliamentarians, and to think about the future. We must lay foundations for the next set of MSPs to build on, and empower the next generation of female parliamentarians to realise that a woman's place is most definitely in the Parliament.

A debate like this—coming just before the end of a parliamentary session and before an election—gives us the chance to look back at and reflect on what has been achieved. I hope that we can feel that, collectively, we have chosen to challenge enough to ensure that the Parliament that we leave behind for the next generation of MSPs has made the positive difference that our country deserves.

However, I do not want the debate to be a moment when we pat one other on the back. This afternoon, we have heard that too much is still to be achieved, too much still needs to be challenged and too much work is still required for us to think that we can sit back and relax. International women's day demands that we, as women in privileged roles of leadership, relentlessly pursue equality, agitate for change and make a difference.

There have been plenty of positive changes during this parliamentary session. In March last year, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Act 2020; the Scottish Government is implementing the ambitious recommendations of the First Minister's national advisory council on women and girls; the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed, setting a "gender representation objective" for public boards that 50 per cent of non-executive members are women; the Scottish Government continues to have equal numbers of women and men in its Cabinet; and our 2020-21 programme for government reaffirmed our commitment to women's health and the development of a women's health plan.

In my portfolio, I worked with Monica Lennon to lock in the world-leading progress that we have made on tackling period dignity, and we supported her bill through the Parliament. We had already rolled out free period products nationally for those on low incomes, implemented free period products in education establishments around the country and enabled local authorities to ensure that products were available in communities. Further, we sought to tackle the stigma of and embarrassment about periods. Monica Lennon's Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 gives our approach legislative underpinning.

I have outlined a range of policies and new laws that are designed to protect and improve women's position in society, along with initiatives that guide us to do more. That list has been largely delivered by female parliamentarians, illustrating how important it is that women need to be in this institution and in political institutions around the world to shape decision making and make it more representative.

Although there is a lot to be proud of, we are not quite yet able to say, "Job done". During the past

year, the pandemic has exposed the deeply entrenched and systemic inequalities that exist and persist in our society, despite best efforts. The impact of the pandemic has touched us all, but not equally. In the introduction to the social renewal advisory board's report, it noted:

"We may all be in the same storm, but we are all in different boats ... and even then, too many of us are with no boat at all."

Disabled people, minority ethnic communities, people on low incomes, older people, younger people and women are among those who have experienced disproportionate impacts, with multiple disadvantages making things even harder for many.

Staying at home has been fine for people who have a safe, secure and warm home; it has been easier for those with a garden and plenty of space. Working from home has been fine for people with a white-collar job that enables them to do so; it has been less easy for people who work in a factory or whose job depends on them being there in person. Home schooling has been more manageable for people who can rely on the support of a partner; it has been less straightforward for single parents, who have to shoulder all the work, care and educational responsibilities.

Domestic abuse, job uncertainty and shouldering a disproportionate burden of care are just some of the ways in which women the world over have been impacted by the restrictions that were so necessary to deal with the pandemic. That is why we have sought to ensure that our approach in Scotland has recognised that uncomfortable truth, whether through providing support and funding to organisations tackling domestic abuse or through prioritising the reopening of early learning and childcare settings to children and progressing our commitment to provide 1,140 hours of free childcare, in the knowledge that that will essentially, albeit not exclusively, support women in their caring roles. That is also why we have provided additional support during the pandemic for unpaid carers, around 60 per cent of whom we know are women, who are a fundamental part of our social care system. We have set out in the budget the ways in which we intend to go further. That includes examining the structure of how care is provided, and how it is valued by us as a society, through the review of social care.

As we emerge from the pandemic, it is important that we do not allow its impact to set back women's rights, and there should not be any regression in those rights. It does not need to be like that. Therefore, we face a choice: do we revert to a pre-pandemic normality, a normality that has failed too many for too long, or do we choose

something different? Do we choose to challenge the assumption that gender bias is to be tolerated and instead work even harder to reform what we do and renew what we are? If it is the latter, that will require us to work in a different way and in a collective way, and to disregard the hostile politics, or the "gey coorse" politics, as Gail Ross described it, that has so dominated this past session, in the chamber and online.

Women, or indeed anyone, looking at how brutal and aggressive politics has become would be forgiven for wanting to give it a wide berth. The result of that will be the continuation of a poorer politics and an unnecessary limit placed on the voices that we have in the chamber, who would otherwise have helped shape the future path for our country. We need to challenge that, and the country will need politicians who are able and willing to work together. The country's recovery will be determined on it.

We have a good starting point. The social renewal advisory board, which Shirley-Anne Somerville and I established to guide and advise the Government on how to navigate a recovery path for Scotland that leads us towards equality and fairness, has provided us with ideas and possible solutions to tackle the entrenched and systemic inequality that the country faces. The board's calls for action aim to ensure that, as we emerge from the pandemic, we could do so in a way that allows us to rebuild and renew, with social justice, equality and human rights at the heart of that.

While some colleagues will not be here after the election to continue to drive forward that work, that does not mean that we stop caring or that we somehow turn off our aspirations for our country. The work to create a better Scotland does not begin and end in this chamber; it requires the engagement and involvement of the people and communities we are all privileged to represent.

The recent citizens assemblies and the inspiring community response to the pandemic show the assets and skills that we have across our country, and we are wise to remember that, while people are currently no longer able to gather in the public gallery to look over and judge our work in the chamber, they remain sovereign, and they are able to judge us on our conduct. They want their parliamentarians working together, scrutinising and robustly holding the Government to account, but respectful of difference. It is a pity that the collaborative work that is done in the Parliament often goes on unnoticed, because it does not drive the headlines or get thousands of likes on Twitter. That narrative is one of the things that I would like to challenge this international women's day—a narrative that somehow assumes that politics needs to be aggressive, that it means playing the

woman or man and not the ball, and that, to be a good politician, you need to be bullish, bordering on rude.

Of course you need a thick skin—we enter this game with our eyes wide open—but we risk losing the very essence of what the Parliament was set up to do: to bring democracy closer to our people, driven by compassion and by kindness. In large part, today's debate has shown what is achievable when debate is respectful and searching and the right space is created for free-flowing exchanges of ideas.

I will miss so many of those who have taken part today, along with the immediate colleagues of my own party, and I pay tribute to them all for what they have contributed, what they have achieved and how they have advanced women's representation in Scotland's body politic.

My advice to whoever the new female parliamentarians might be, who will sit in this chamber in just a few months' time, is for them to choose to do their politics how they want to, to not feel that they need to ape or copy the worst examples of adversarial debate and instead to know that one of the best ways in which we can attract a diversity of voices in the chamber and tackle the persistent imbalance with regard to female parliamentarians is to make it a place that people want to be part of—not somewhere they will feel threatened.

Kindness in politics has never mattered more, and I have been blessed to have served alongside kind, committed parliamentarians—so many of whom are here today. I thank everyone who has made my privileged time in the Parliament so enjoyable and memorable. I send my best wishes to all my fellow MSPs who are not seeking re-election this May. Although I know that we are stepping back from front-line politics, I know that we will not step back from continuing to choose to challenge.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes our debate on international women's day 2021.

Motion Without Notice

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I am conscious that we are well ahead of time, so I am minded to accept a motion without notice to bring forward decision time.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4 of Standing Orders, Decision Time on Thursday 4 March be taken at 5.31 pm.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are two questions this evening. Because the first question is on legislation, we will need to suspend for a few moments to allow all members to access the voting app.

17:31

Meeting suspended.

17:34

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-24057, in the name of Gordon Lindhurst, on the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know if you had any difficulties in voting.

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had a problem with my app. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Mason. You would have voted yes. I will make sure that your vote is added to the voting register.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)

Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S5M-24057, in the name of Gordon Lindhurst, on the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill, is: For 62, Against 0, Abstentions 56.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-24038, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill, be agreed to. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know if you had any difficulty in voting.

Tom Mason: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had the same problem. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Mason. I will make sure that your yes vote is added to the register.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S5M-24038, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill, is: For 119, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliamentary Standards (Sexual Harassment and Complaints Process) Bill be passed.

Meeting closed at 17:40.

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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